

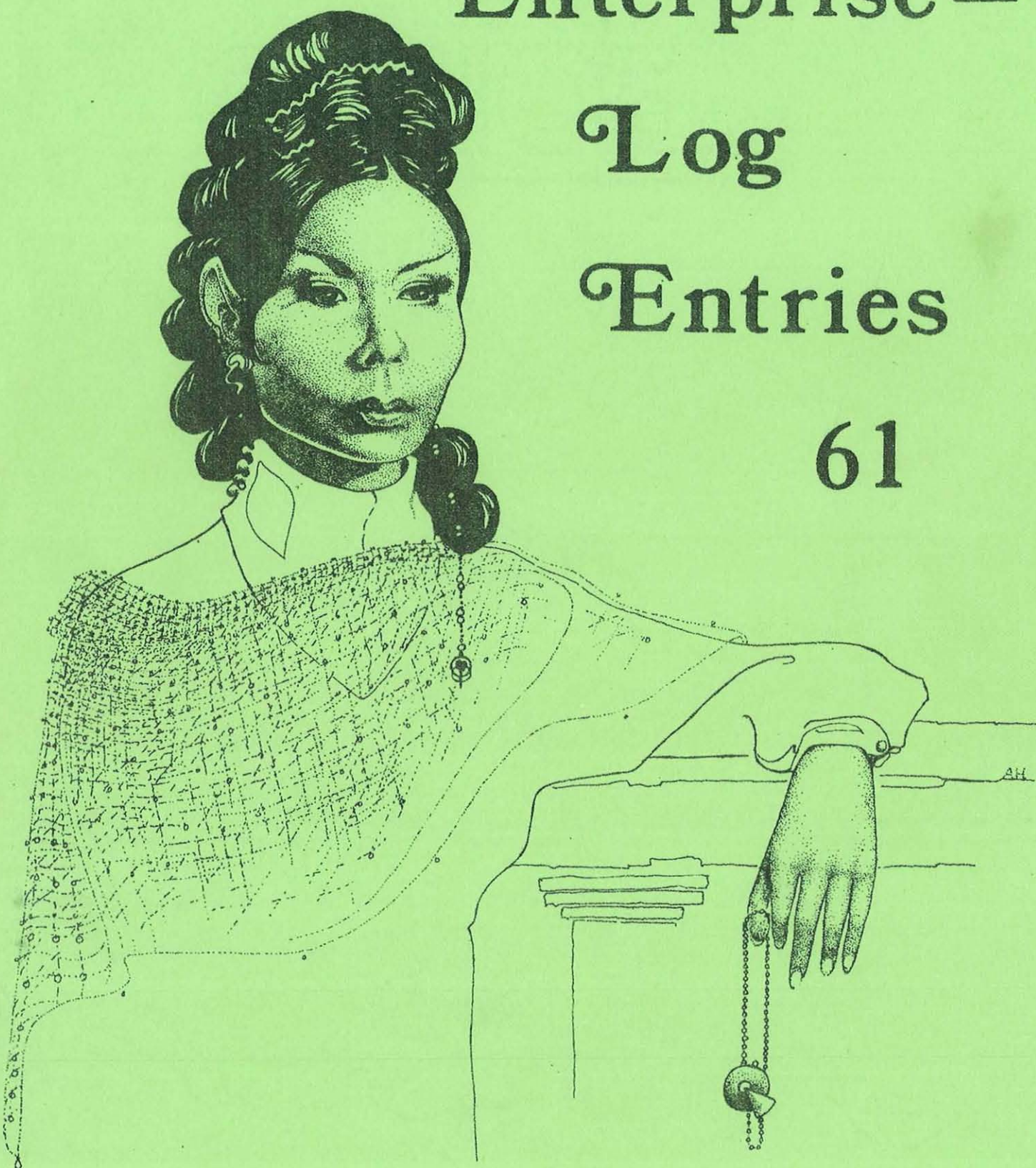
Scotpress

Enterprise—

Log

Entries

61



a Star Trek
fanzine

- contents -

The Bonding	by Janice Pitkethley	P 3
Silent Hero	by Janice Pitkethley	P 4
1984 Calendar	by Janet, Emma & Neil Stewart	P 8
Conflicting Views	by Charlotte Davis	P 9
With You by my Side	by Linda C. Wood	P 17
All Our Tomorrows	by Vicki Richards	P 18
Justice Should be Seen to be Done	by Kay Stagg	P 31

Illustrations

A.H.: Cover, P2.
Charlotte Davis: P10, 13, 15.

A Scotpress Publication.

Editors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini

Typing - Valerie Piacentini

Proofreading - Sheila Clark

Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.

Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Frances Abernethy, Hilde McCabe,
Allison Rooney

Distracting - Shona

Stencil Chewing - Shah

Enterprise - Log Entries 61 is available from:

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
By Dundee
Scotland

(C) Scotpress. All rights are reserved to the writers and artists. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the original material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. It is understood that this applies only to original material herein, and that no attempt is made to supersede any rights held by Paramount, NEC, BBC, or any other holders of copyright in STAR TREK material.

April 1984.

Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 61.

From the next issue, Sheila will again be editing Log Entries for a while; this is due to a change in our 'production methods', which Sheila will explain in detail in the editorial for the next issue. As things stand at the moment, I will be doing the next single story zines. We hope that you will be pleased with our new method, which opens up many possibilities for us; since Janet and Sheila are 'tooled up and ready to go', we have decided that issue 62 will be the first using our new system.

Being Scots, we are often asked about suitable dialogue for Scotty; we have decided that as we are running out of jokes to use as page fillers, instead we will occasionally list a few Scots words you may not have come across; the first batch are in this issue.

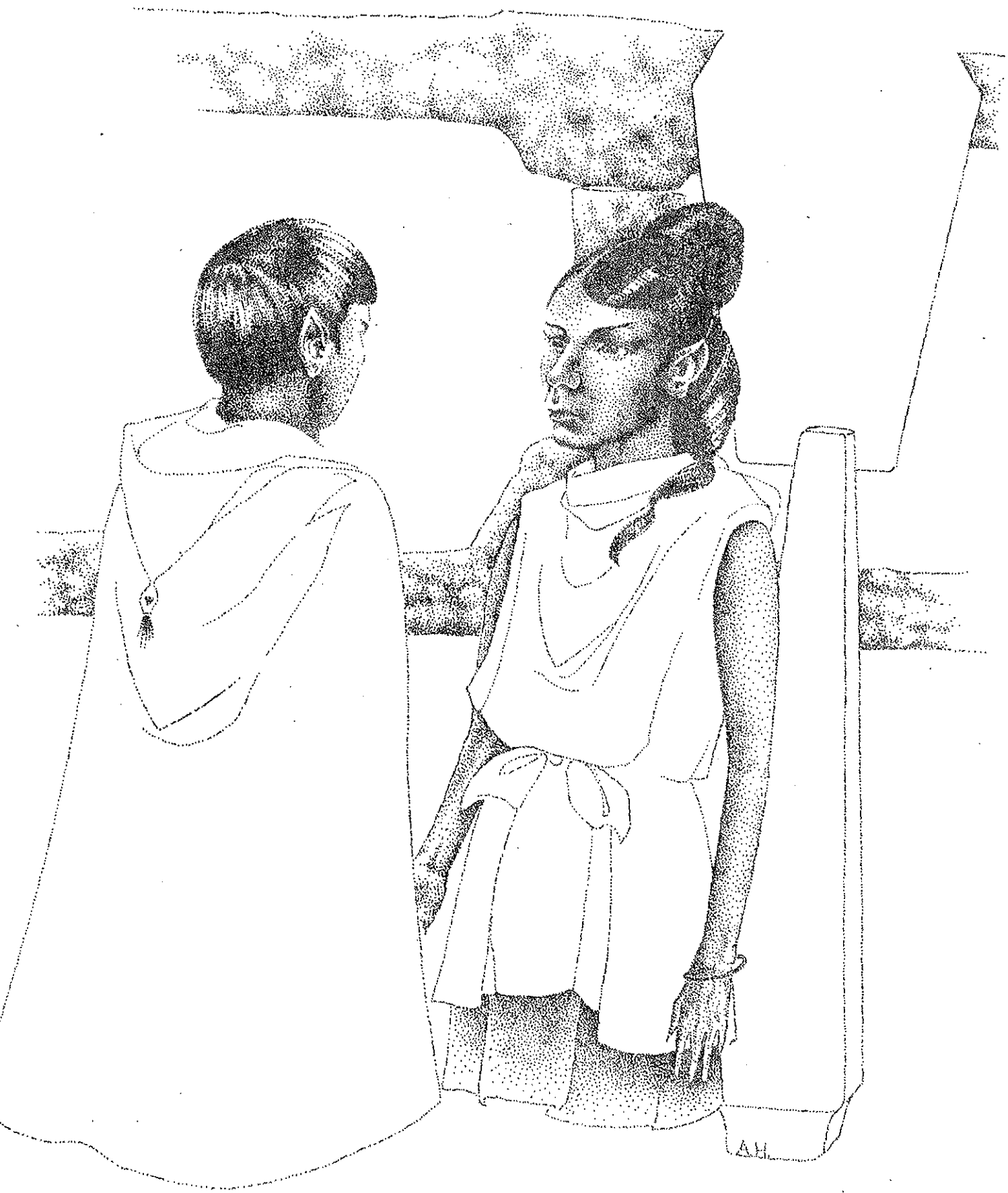
Valerie

Contributions of artwork, fiction and poetry are always welcome for Scotpress zines, and can be sent to:

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
By Dundee
Scotland

or

Valerie Piacentini
20 Ardrossan Road
Saltcoats
Ayrshire
Scotland



BONDING

Two months had passed since the Kahs-wan. One night Spock looked up from the book he was reading and laid it aside as Sarek spoke his name.

"Yes, Father?"

"Spock, you survived the Kahs-wan with honour," Sarek began. "According to Vulcan law and custom, we have chosen your bondmate."

"My... bondmate?"

"Yes. Sometime in the future when you are both adult she will be your wife. We have chosen T'Pring."

"T'Pring..."

A mental image of a girl in his class at school appeared in his mind. He had only spoken to her once, but at least she did not taunt him like the others.

"There is a short ceremony." Sarek's voice interrupted his thoughts. "You will have to mind meld with T'Pring and establish the bond. The bonding is less than a marriage, but more than a betrothal. It will take place four days from now."

Sarek dismissed him and he went to his room to think over this latest happening in his life. Bonding... Spock had heard of it; he knew that every Vulcan male was bonded after the Kahs-wan at the age of seven.

//This is our way, the Vulcan way,// he thought. //But why? It is logical for our parents to make the choice. There are many things I do not understand.//

Spock tried to engage himself in reading his book once more, but had to give up. He could not concentrate on the words - his mind was too active. He remembered the discussion in Sarek's study after the Kahs-wan... somehow all the events connected. Bonding, then marriage when they were both adult. He shuddered, remembering the link with the irrational Vulcan. There were so many gaps in the facts Sarek had told him, and he knew he dare not ask.

//I must not think thoughts like these! It is illogical./ He strove to banish them from his mind, succeeded, and did not think of the subject again.

* * *

On the day of the bonding Sarek and Amanda took him away from the city of Shi-Kahr to a place he had never been before. He found himself out on the Forge somewhere, in a circular arena surrounded by the Ancient Stones. In the centre a firepit burned, and the wind chimes tinkled in the hot breeze.

"This is our place of Koon-ut-kal-if-fee," Sarek stated. "We await the arrival of T'Pring and her parents."

They did not have long to wait, the other party appearing a few moments later. Spock stared as they approached, and T'Pring stared back.

The formal greetings over, Sarek began the short ceremony. Following Vulcan custom, the father of the boy acted as mediator.

"As it was from the dawn of our beginnings, as it is now, I offer my son Spock in bonding with the female T'Pring."

Spock stepped forward, T'Pring doing likewise, their hands reaching for each others temples. Both sets of parents looked on in silence as they stood locked in the mind meld. Sarek touched Spock and T'Pring to feel their thoughts, guiding the minds together. The bond had been established.

"Thee are one," he said, drawing them apart. "At the proper time both of you will be drawn to this place of Koon-ut-kal-if-fee."

* * *

It was over. Spock felt no different after the bonding, but T'Pring knew

that a part of her mind did not belong to her any more. Both families said their farewells and departed.

On the way home Amanda thought about the custom of bonding. It took place on Earth as well, some nations still believing in arranged marriages. Sometimes it did not work, for the girl rebelled against her parents' choice as she grew into womanhood. But that was on Earth, not Vulcan...

//Spock is growing up too fast,// she thought with some regret. //Here he is, bonded already.//

She went to prepare a meal when they arrived home, leaving Sarek and Spock alone for a while.

"Father..." Spock began, "I wish to ask... were you bonded as I was?"

"Yes. My bondmate died before reaching maturity. The bond was broken."

"Could you have selected another?"

"I did not want to be bonded again. My duties as Ambassador took me far away from Vulcan and..." He stopped abruptly. "You will cease this, Spock. I sense your thoughts. You are trying to get information from me."

"I ask forgiveness."

Sarek's stern expression relaxed as he looked at his young son. "I know you are curious. I was also at your age. You will receive all answers when you are old enough to understand."

"Yes, Father."

Amanda called to them that dinner was ready. As they rose to leave Sarek touched his son's shoulder in a rare gesture of affection.

** ** **
* * *
** * **
** * **

SILENT HERO

The road thinned to a dusty track and the buildings became fewer and fewer as Spock left Shi-Kahr behind. He felt the scanners brush over him as he passed through the invisible beams and out into the edges of the desert. I-Chaya lumbered at his side, panting in the heat. The faithful sehlat followed his young friend everywhere.

The terrain grew even more wild and barren as they travelled on. Spock was heading for his favourite place, the Daer-Lon reservoir. Vulcan had very little surface water, and the engineers had built a complex water system leading from the L-Langon Mountains. Any small underground springs pumped their way through miles of pipeline and into the specially constructed Daer-Lon basin, which supplied the city of Shi-Kahr.

Spock knew his parents would not approve of him coming to this place alone, and so he never told them of his intentions.

I-Chaya too loved the Daer-Lon. His nose twitched excitedly as the scent of water reached him on the hot breeze. Sparse vegetation grew on the banks of the reservoir, most of it tall and tree-like; only the water-enriched soil enabled it to survive.

Spock sat down at the water's edge, removing his shoes and allowing his bare feet to dangle in the water. He watched the ripples on the surface as his thoughts drifted... How clearly he remembered the times when he had come here with his parents.

Most Vulcans were unable to swim; the opportunity seldom arose due to the lack of surface water on the arid planet. Sarek's own father had been Vulcan's ambassador, and had learned the art at an early stage in his career; he in turn had taught Sarek at an early age, and Amanda had insisted that Sarek be Spock's

instructor. The lessons had started soon after Spock had begun to walk unaided; he loved them, and progressed rapidly, the Vulcan strength making him a powerful swimmer. Then Amanda took over, teaching him the aspects of water safety and life saving, things of which Sarek had no knowledge. Her husband had accepted her explanation as logical when she told him that Spock would be in need of the skills when he went to Earth and encountered the crashing waves of the oceans.

Spock's thoughts drifted from there to the events of the past months. Again he relived the ordeal of the Kahs-wan and his bonding to T'Pring a few weeks later. He had not thought of her since the day they had mind-melded in the arena; he was not too sure of what it had meant, and Sarek would not give him any information.

A loud rumble brought Spock from his reverie. He almost laughed out loud as he learned the source of the noise - a few feet away I-Chaya lay asleep and snoring.

"You big old furbag..." Spock used an expression his mother often employed when addressing the sehlat. It could not be something bad, as she always smiled when she said it, but Spock was careful not to repeat it when Sarek was present.

That brought him to thinking about all the quaint and unusual expressions of speech his mother sometimes used. They were all from Earth, and most of the time he failed to comprehend their meaning.

The thoughts instantly vanished. I-Chaya lifted his head and growled as the sound of a faint cry reached them. It came from the far side of a stone wall which jutted out over the water, forming a sort of pier.

Immediately Spock was on his feet and running towards the sound, I-Chaya at his heels. Scrambling over the stone structure, he saw the figure of a little girl struggling in the deep water.

Ordering I-Chaya to "Stay!" he ran along to the end of the wall and dived into the water. It came as a shock; on the surface it was pleasantly warm, but in the depths where the sun could not reach it felt distinctly cold. The drowning figure was some way out, and he swam as fast as he could towards her. He saw the girl submerge, then reappear... once... twice...

Amanda's firm instructions flashed through his mind. "Do not allow the victim to touch you. A drowning clutch is almost impossible to break. Always approach from the rear."

Spock dived under the water and surfaced behind the girl. He grasped the long streaming hair in one hand and slid his left arm across her shoulder, holding her securely around the body. She gripped his arm tightly and held on.

After speaking calmly to the girl and telling her what he was going to do, Spock set about the task of towing her to shore. It seemed twice as far now with the extra weight pulling against him. Once the girl began to struggle again, and he submerged her for a second, speaking sharply to her.

"Cease! You must not hinder me."

Frightened at being held under, the girl's struggles stopped.

At long last Spock's feet touched bottom and he stood upright, wading the last few yards. He assisted the girl up the sloping bank and they both collapsed on the grass, breathless after the experience.

"What is your name?" he asked when he had recovered sufficiently to speak. He estimated her age at five years, two years younger than himself.

"I am T'Rie. Thank you for saving my life, S..." She looked at him questioningly.

"I am Spock, son of Sarek."

He asked her why she was so far away from Shi-Kahr, and how she had fallen into the water. The girl began her story, then Spock interrupted as the steam

began to rise from their sodden garments.

"Our clothes will dry rapidly if we spread them out..."

T'Rie just stared at him.

"I do not intend to be disrespectful," he continued. "You will remain here and I shall proceed to the far side of the stone structure."

I-Chaya got to his feet and followed his young master. The wall offered a sense of seclusion, and soon Spock's wet garments were hanging on the spiky leaves of a giant cactus. The sun's fiery rays felt very hot as they beat down on his skin.

//At least my skin cannot burn.// He thought back to the sufferings of various Human visitors to Vulcan, and shuddered as he remembered their red and blistered skin.

In a very short time his clothing was dry, even down to the light footwear. Spock waited to hear T'Rie's call before returning to where he had left her.

"Come. I will take you home."

T'Rie seemed none the worse for her brush with death. She talked a lot, continuing her story as they took the path back to Shi-Kahr. For Spock, this was a new and interesting experience. T'Rie spoke to him as an equal. It seemed strange for another Vulcan child to speak to him without insulting him.

//She does not know I am not a full Vulcan,// Spock thought. //Father was correct when he told me my Human half no longer shows.//

"Where do you live?" he asked as they passed through the sensors at the entrance to Shi-Kahr.

"It is not far from here." She led him through the streets. "This is my home." They stopped at the gateway. "Wait here," she instructed, but as soon as she was out of sight, Spock quietly slipped away.

* * *

T'Rie explained to her father how the young boy had saved her from drowning. Only her father's raised eyebrows gave any indication of his thoughts.

"Where is this boy?" Stven asked.

"He is waiting at the gateway, Father," T'Rie answered.

But, when they reached the gateway, the street was empty. He had gone...

Stven questioned his daughter closely about her rescuer. "What was his name?"

"He was called Spock."

"It does not give much information as to his identity. His ability to swim so powerfully could lead us to him. The ability is rare in a Vulcan. Also, he was capable of a rescue operation. Think, now, T'Rie. Did he give his family name?"

"Spock, son of Sarek, Father."

"Sarek?" Stven's eyebrows rose again. "He is a very important man, and Ambassador of our planet. He could have a son... I will check the records..."

* * *

"Where have you been?" Amanda sounded very worried when Spock arrived home. "You have been away for hours!"

"I went out to the Forge," Spock replied.

"What attracts you to that awful place I'll never know! Look at you... Sand in your hair and your clothes all dusty. Do go and shower before your father sees you!" Amanda scolded.

Spock obeyed his mother's instructions. //This is the second time I have been immersed in water today!// he thought idly as the jets pelted him like stinging needles. The hissing spray stopped suddenly for some unknown reason. Spock looked at the controls in puzzlement - they were still at their original setting.

"Spock..."

He shook the water from his eyes at the sound of his name. Sarek stood there.

"Dress quickly," Sarek commanded. "You have visitors. They await your presence."

"Visitors? For me? Who are they, Father?"

"You already know their identity. Come."

Spock's mouth almost fell open as he walked into the room and saw T'Rie standing there with her father. His astonishment grew even further as Stven greeted him like an adult Vulcan.

"I commend you on your actions, courageous son of Sarek. You held my daughter's life in your hands."

"It was the logical thing to do. Life should be preserved whenever possible." A faint greenish tinge came to Spock's cheeks.

"Live long and prosper, Spock, son of Vulcan." Stven raised his hand, fingers parted in the Vulcan salute.

"I am honoured, sir." Spock returned the hand sign.

Stven stepped forward and pinned a small insignia to Spock's tunic. "This is the Award of Merit. Wear it with honour, young Spock."

"I will, sir, and... thank you."

The visitors departed. Sarek waited until they had gone and gently reprimanded Spock for not telling them about his rescue.

"You have brought honour to our family. I too am... pleased at your actions."

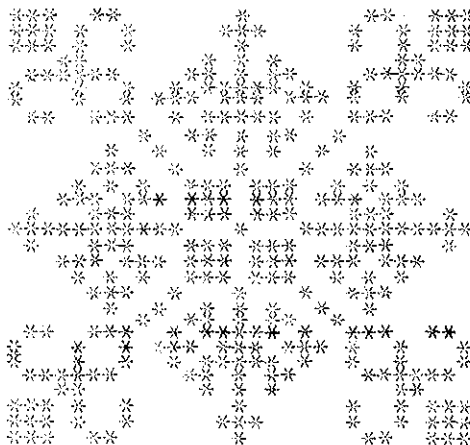
"Yes, Father..." Spock did not know what to say at Sarek's words of praise.

"You are really proud of him," Amanda said when they were alone. "I can tell."

"It is not logical..."

"Logic!" Amanda laughed. "You are proud of your son."

"I am," Sarek admitted, touching his hand to Amanda's.



STAR TREK 1984 CALENDAR
(Alternative Captions)

by

Janet, Emma & Neil Stewart

January

Spock: "Chocolates, Jim?"

Kirk: "Maltesers!"

* * *

February

Kirk: "No, Sulu, you don't do the dance like that. You put the sword on the floor and hold your arms like this."

* * *

March

Nurse Chapel: (thinks) He really could do with borrowing my eyebrow tweezers again.

* * *

April

Kirk: "For heaven 's sake, Spock, stop leaning on that wall! Haven't you done enough damage already?"

* * *

May

Kirk (on a visit to Madame Tussaud's) "They almost look real!"

* * *

June

Kirk: "Hmm, they're nice!"

* * *

July

McCoy (thinks) : Jim must have run out of Grecian 2000 again.

* * *

August

Kirk: "These Yorkshire puddings look just about ready now."

* * *

September

Spock: "You'll have to keep still, Mr. Scott, or I won't be able to get it out."

* * *

October

Nurse Chapel(thinks) : If I lift my skirt up a bit, perhaps he won't notice Uhura has a bigger bust than me.

* * *

November

Spock(thinks) : I feel a bit strange not wearing trousers, but at least this proves I really am superior in every respect.

* * *

December

Khan Noonian Singh: "It's my finger, Doctor."

* * * * *

CONFLICTING VIEWS

by

Charlotte Davis

//T'Pring, come.//

T'Pring had been kneeling on a cushion while trying to master a passage on the lytherette. At Stonn's mental call she got up, put the instrument into its case, and went out into the entry where Stonn had just arrived with another scientist and his mate.

"Scientist Shanak and she who is his wife will work with us today."

T'Pring nodded mutely and listened to her master speaking with the couple while accompanying them into the main room. She herself followed, awaiting commands. T'Pring automatically adopted the role of chattel in the presence of strangers, even though in private Stonn had relented after seeing her change of attitude as well as her absolute loyalty to him and to Vulcan tradition. It was obvious that he valued her. As yet, demonstrating this publicly would be unthinkable, considering the sternness of Vulcan customs and ethics. T'Pring had long since accepted her status in the same way she accepted the small kindnesses shown her by Stonn. She well knew that the only escape from the isolation and shame of her existence was withdrawal, but she was not permitted to resort to this radical resolution of her situation. According to law she was Stonn's, body and mind, and he alone could dispose of her. As he now accepted her, though, she had a good number of rights, so that their relationship was pleasing. T'Pring was all too conscious of the fact that her position could have been much worse.

T'Pring observed Shanak and T'Preda. She could not feel rejection from them, only indifference, as if she was nonexistent. She saw Stonn gesture at her with his hand, and sat down on a bench near the door. She was not needed just yet, and Stonn clearly wished her to hear the conversation.

A little while later Shanak gave her master a number of tapes, which Stonn checked before signing and returning a form to his friend.

//T'Pring, attend.//

She rose and came over to him, eyes averted, stance submissive.

"Take these tapes to my Elders, then return immediately." He gave her the container, and turned back to the others.

T'Pring glanced at the couple covertly. They were examining a new piece of equipment. T'Pring quickly lowered her eyes as she met those of T'Preda, who gave her a slight nod of acknowledgement before continuing her examination.

Before entering the street T'Pring covered her hair and shoulders with a translucent length of fabric embroidered at both ends with the emblem of the T'Heavoc'arin. Being Chattel, T'Pring was forbidden to 'show' herself in public, and the emblem itself denoted her as property.

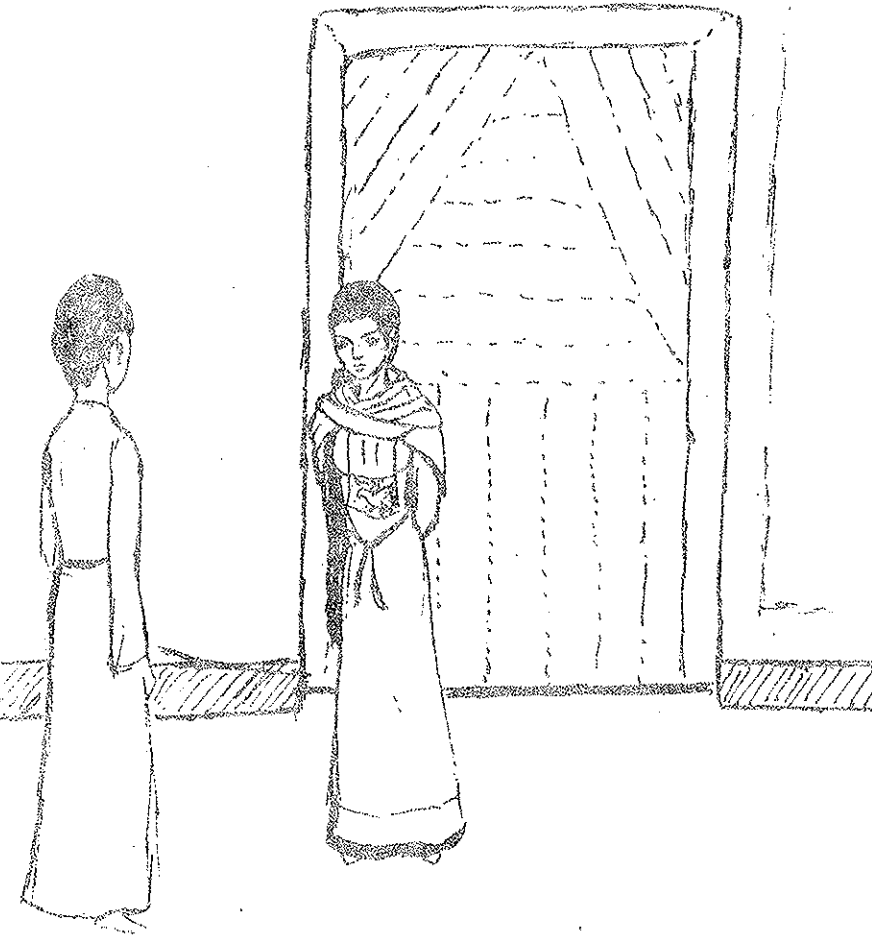
* * *

After forty minutes she arrived at the city home of Stonn's Clan and struck a panel in the gateway lightly. She was given access, and once inside drew the fabric off her head. Stonn's youngest brother, Stenet, took her to T'Paret, in front of whom she came to stand, head inclined and holding the container in both hands.

"Chattel of Stonn?"

"I am here to deliver these tapes to the Elders of my Possessor's Clan." She held out the container, which T'Paret placed on a cabinet in the main room before turning to look at the girl.

The veil-like material of the maddeh hung around T'Pring's shoulders in carefully arranged folds. This article of outside wear corresponded to her status,



but T'Paret's eyes grew pensive when she noted that both T'Pring's hairstyle and dress were now modified. She would have to contact Stonn, and try to arrest or even reverse certain developments.

T'Paret had no doubts Stonn would comply with his duty to the Clan. Inwardly she considered it most regrettable that Stonn had taken T'Pring as Chattel - due to the circumstances he would have incurred no dishonour in rejecting her; but he had been merciful. Vulcans were not cruel, but in absolute isolation and confronted with complete rejection, T'Pring's life would have indeed been forfeit, not like it was now with her master.

Outwardly, T'Paret remained indifferent, and only said, "Return, Chattel of Stonn."

Thus dismissed, T'Pring readjusted the fabric as she walked out through the entry.

On her way home she passed by one or two couples she knew, but there was no exchange of greetings, as she was to all intents and purposes an object. On passing one group, though, she heard the words, "Cast off... Rejected by her bondmate... Chattel..."

T'Pring was illogically thankful that the veil hid the emerald tinge that very faintly suffused her cheeks.

//Illogical. The statement is in accordance with fact and should cause no discomfort.// Yet the discomfort remained. She knew that Stonn at times heard such comments when appearing in public with her. //I bring him dishonour through my very existence.//

The sun seemed to burn even more fiercely, and T'Pring swallowed to ease the sudden parched feeling in her throat. When she arrived she quickly slipped in the door to Stonn's house after shaking the dust off her clothing, and briefly stood in the entrance hall, controlling her breathing and pulse rate. T'Paret's scrutiny had been disquieting, as had been the words she had heard. T'Pring was unable to understand what was happening to her, and only knew that she could no longer totally suppress.

"I come to serve."

Stonn looked up and motioned her over. "Show the wife of Shanak the experimental plots and hydroponics installations.

T'Pring's lips briefly firmed to an undeniable pout before she replied, "I obey."

Stonn saw the hint of expression. "Chattel." She went to him, and he touched a hand to her right temple. //Shanak and T'Preda are my friends, and for that reason will accept you.//

//But I am outcast!// was T'Pring's mental cry of protest.

//Obey!//

T'Pring went over to T'Preda and inclined her head in respect before leading the way.

Stonn turned to Shanak. "T'hy'la, your bondmate has remarkable tolerance. As you know, I intend to accept my Chattel, and to continue treating her as outcast would be illogical."

"I comprehend. We shall act in accordance with your desire. But... laws for Chattels are immutable."

"This is known to me."

Stonn recalled Healer Sherik's expression at seeing his concern when he had found T'Pring whom he had seriously injured then abandoned while under the influence of venom. She had been cared for at the clinic, but kept strictly isolated. After her recovery, one of Stonn's brothers had been called to take charge of 'the property of Scientist Stonn'.

The two scientists resumed discussing the feasibility of introducing the new equipment into regular research before beginning to plan one of their own projects, when the communicator activated. Stonn opened contact, and Simur of Xenobiology appeared on the screen.

"Scientist Stonn, is Scientist Shanak with you?"

"Affirmative."

Shanak went to the outlet.

"Your presence is required for the next phase of Process L-81/9."

"I shall come immediately. In 11.4 minutes."

The screen deactivated, and Shanak said to Stonn, "My wife will remain with you until I return."

* * *

An hour later Stonn heard T'Preda and his Chattel enter. "Wife of Shanak, your husband has been called to the Academy, and requests you to remain and continue examination of the installations before resuming work until his return."

She nodded, and T'Pring, after a sideways glance at Stonn, led the way up the stairs to hydroponics.

The two women had hardly left than Stonn heard the chimes of the door leading to the street, and went to open it. His father Solek entered, and gave him the formal greeting to which Stonn replied before preceeding him to the main room, where the two males sat down facing each other.

Solek opened the conversation. "Your Chattel delivered the tapes. Others arrived for you shortly after her departure. Sternal acquired them during the current merchandising session on Terra. They should be of interest for your work."

He then continued, "There is now the question of extending the city home of our Clan to accomodate your younger brother and his future mate. Construction will commence in four months."

As all homes, it had been gradually enlarged until it now housed most of the families of the Clan system, granting each one privacy, yet immediate contact if desired.

Stonn approved of the plans, and wanted to request the same privilege, when T'Preda and T'pring passed by the door to the main room on their way to the laboratory. Both were deeply involved in a technical discussion.

Solek stiffened and met Stonn's glance, eyebrows raised in an expression of severest disapproval. "My son, you appear ignorant of the requirements for Chattel. No honourable woman may associate with her. Refer sociology tape 15611/a."

Stonn's glance did not waver. "I have granted her extensive rights in the privacy of my home, all of which she has earned by her actions since Kal-if-fee."

"I maintain that you permit her to overstep the clearly defined limits of a Chattel's existence," said Solek flatly.

"She obeys the limits imposed on her, and did not attempt to force one privilege," was Stonn's quiet reply.

"I see no logic in granting a female who will remain servant and Chattel any rights." Solek's voice was strangely inflectionless, and Stonn tensed.

"Honoured Elder, I wish to keep her as my own when my Time comes."

Solek's hazel eyes widened slightly as he absorbed the impact of Stonn's words, then his face hardened with disapproval. "Ypu will not contemplate dishonouring our Clan by taking a female declared outcast and clanless property as your mate. Either you are abandoning the rules of Vulcan life, or your plan is emotionally motivated. Could it be that your aesthetically very pleasing Chattel has made you desire her as Salar did his slave T'Verna?"

Stonn grew visibly pale at the accusation. He knew of the scandal of six generations ago which had ended in Salar's being declared outcast. He wanted no breach of custom, nor did he want discord with his Clan, yet at the same time he was determined to keep T'Pring, and possibly grant her status as his wife.

"No, my father, but recall that I had planned to take her as my mate. You had agreed it would be permitted after the Time. T'Pring had your approval, sight unseen."

"I would have permitted but for her slanderous words and her deceit - which are known to all due to the fame of her bondmate."

"It is illogical that one occasion is to be the only measure by which a given individual is judged."

"I concede the point. However, her deed is unforgivable. Recall the details of Kal-if-fee: the ruptured pledge; her explanations; her arrogance in believing she could transgress with impunity."

"She specified, and you can question her for yourself." //T'Pring, attend my father and me in the main room.//

"To what purpose?"

"To know her mind as I do. She is coming."

T'Pring entered nearly immediately, and Stonn noticed her stance hinted at apprehension.

"Chattel, who are you to speak with the wife of Shanak?" was Solek's query.

"It was my Possessor's command to show her the installations, Elder of my Possessor." Her intonation was neutral.

"My son, it appears such duties are yours. To have your Chattel do so implies contempt for the wife of Shanak." Solek's expression showed displeasure.

Stonn covertly looked over at T'Pring and saw that her features showed nothing. She stood in front of him and his father, hands flat on her thighs, her eyes lowered.

"Chattel of Stonn, advance."

T'Pring quickly glanced at Stonn, then complied.

Stonn said, "My father, proceed," and added, "Should you consider her deserving of discipline, I shall administer it myself. I require her for further duties, so no mind-block should be imposed."

His father nodded - the request was Stonn's right as T'Pring's owner. "I will see her mind as is my right as your Elder."

The older man concentrated as T'Pring went over to him and raised her head slightly, formally offering contact. She appeared unconcerned, but knowing her as well as he did, Stonn recognised tension in the slight lift of her shoulders, in the tightness of her delicate features.

Solek touched her temples, and carefully entered her mind. He encountered her view of her fate before the Challenge, her choice of Stonn, her reasons for her actions, and finally her reactions to the outcome.

//Rebellious even now, Chattel?//

//Father of my Possessor, I accept.//

//I shall go further now.//

//I am prepared.//

Stonn, who was observing the two, saw T'Pring relax slightly. Solek now touched her suppressed emotions, and was disturbed upon encountering her perception



of Stonn. He tested the strength of the link before ending the fusion and, returning to awareness, he felt T'Pring's momentary weakness. He helped her to a chair some steps away, and when she had recovered some moments later, commanded, "Chattel, leave us."

The girl got up and turned away, and Stonn felt how humiliated she was as his father said, "Your Chattel's disgrace remains - she can hardly regain her status. I am concerned by her emotional attachment to you which I perceived. As to the degree of linkage, I cannot recall having given you leave to intensify it."

"The original one was ruptured."

"You have been given supplementary training as your telepathic potential is very high. You are capable of determining the strength of any link you create, even without supervision. Your present link with T'Pring is nearly as strong as a bonding link."

T'Pring could not hear any more as she went out to join T'Preda. When the wife of Shanak spoke to her, she quickly looked back at Solek and her Possessor.

Once in the lab, the two women began to process data. Shanak returned after two hours, spent some moments with Stonn and Solek, then came to join them in the lab. Stonn's father left a little later, and T'Pring covertly looked over at Stonn as he entered and switched on the annex he needed. She could not determine anything by his expression, and he had partially shut the link.

Some hours later the first phase had been completed and the other couple returned home. Stonn was left with T'Pring, who stood motionlessly at her place, waiting silently. Stonn gazed at her. His father had not hurt her, but he had touched her emotions, sifting through them as he had through her memories. T'Pring was distressed, so much was obvious.

"T'Pring, I regret."

She did not reply, nor did she meet his eyes.

"I have granted you modified dress and hairstyle, T'Pring. My father only demands that you again wear the Clan emblem to denote your status at all times. It is a legitimate request, as you are still rightless property."

He took an oval metal brooch from a shelf and attached it to her dress over her left breast. T'Pring touched it - the bird of prey was meticulously chased even to the scales on the claws, the feathers displaced in flight. The sign of her status was like a beautiful ornament, copper on greenish-gold metal. She had expected worse than this, but in principle it was all the same, this or a slave brand...

T'Pring hesitantly looked up at Stonn as he said, "My father now knows all and will confer with T'Paret and the Matriarch T'Paren."

He suppressed the empathy he felt for T'Pring. She had chosen her fate, and had to accept the outcome. Something, however, made him reach out and lightly pass a finger over the small hand still covering the brooch.

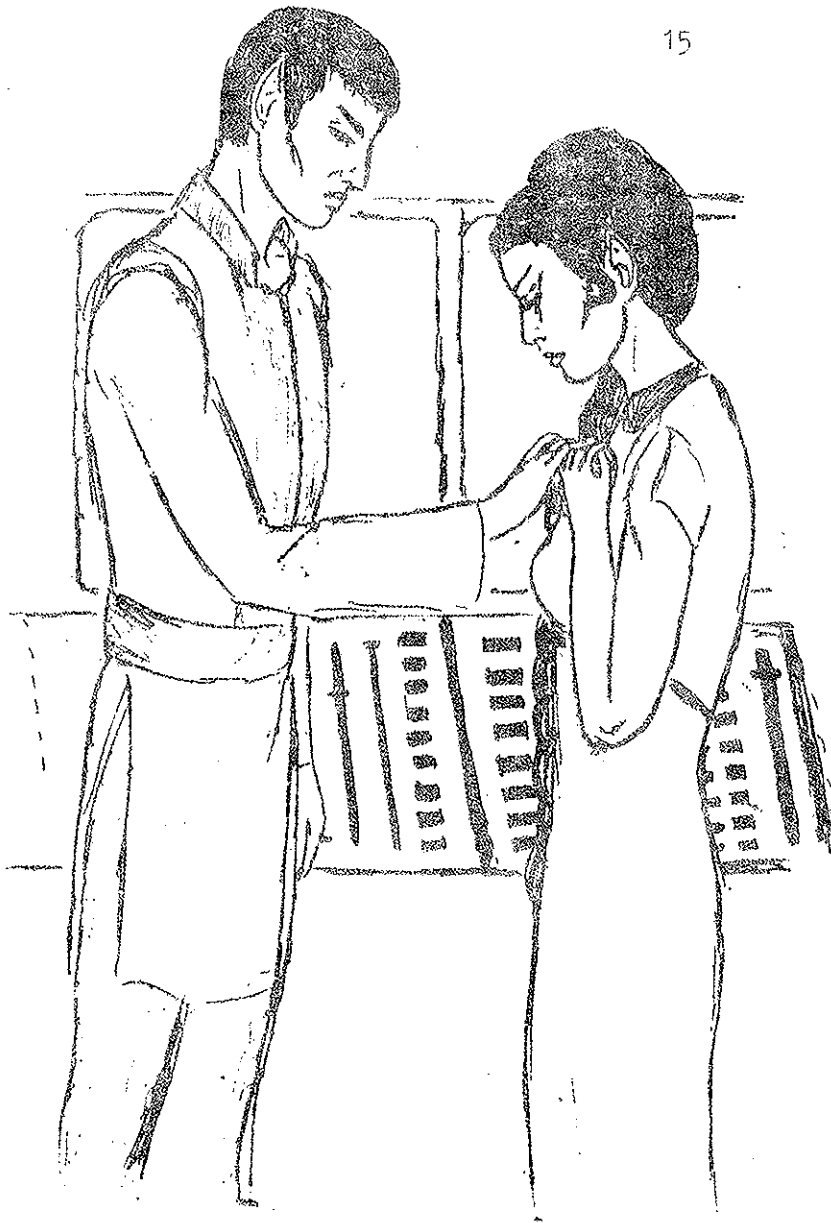
Stonn walked out to the supply room as he still had a detail of basic work to complete. He was uneasy, but he knew his father had been within his rights as pertained to his reaction to Stonn's wish to keep a clanless Chattel and accept 'it' as wife. He came back out with the chemicals and saw T'Pring at her console, head inclined so that he could not see her face.

"Are you in discomfort?"

"Negative, Scientist Stonn." Her voice was even, emotionless.

"Look at me."

She complied, and Stonn saw the hint of despair in the velvety depths of her eyes. He could only guess at how much of the conversation with his father she had heard while in the laboratory.



T'Pring raised her left hand in pleading. "My Possessor, my status is permanent, no matter how many rights you grant me. The conflict with your father was unnecessary. Stonn, release me - my very existence creates shame for you and all T'Heavoc'arin."

The girl pushed her braid back and took Stonn's hands, placing them against her neck, and waited.

Stonn abruptly realised what she expected him to do, and drew away, horrified. "No!" His features grew hard. "Attend to your duties, Chattel."

T'Pring nodded and resumed programming. Even honourable release was denied her. She felt a surge of emotions and suppressed them, but her body suddenly rebelled against the constant stress, and she noticed her hands were trembling so that she could not continue her work.

In a voice that was little more than a whisper she said, "I beg leave to depart for meditation."

Stonn saw signs of tension in her smooth, lovely face that he had not seen there before. T'Pring was obviously suffering under the total isolation and rejection imposed on her by the outside world, and the contempt she encountered. Such tension could have deleterious effects. It seemed his acceptance of her and his conflict with his Elders had made the situation worse than if she had had to resign herself to the finality of her fate as property.

He inquired, disquieted, "I repeat my inquiry. I wish to know."

She averted her glance. "I feel unwell at times, but can control. My emotional barriers are deteriorating, however. I cannot totally suppress."

"Depart." Stonn turned away. There was nothing he could do for her. He had nearly overstepped his own limits as to his treatment of T'Pring, considering the situation that was deemed appropriate for a Chattel. He had not told T'Pring that his request to have her assist him at the Academy had met with the sternest refusal. Laws were immutable...

* * *

A month later T'Pirai, his sister, spent a day with Stonn and T'Pring while preparing for a minor excursion she would participate in. Stonn saw that his twin sister was absolute in her refusal to interact with T'Pring. He had been packing gear, and saw T'Pring approach T'Pirai.

"Do you require assistance, sister of my Possessor?"

T'Pirai replied, "Negative," in a tone of voice that implied the girl's presence was onerous to her.

T'Pring gazed at her for a moment, then made a gesture of apology before returning to her place by the door. She glanced over at Stonn before dropping her gaze to her clasped hands.

Stonn went to T'Pirai some minutes later. "My sister, T'Pring will participate in our work during the excursion to the Sunir lakes."

The young woman looked up from her tasks and said quietly, "It is for you to decide." He inflection implied acceptance but not agreement.

Stonn commanded, "Depart, T'Pring." She left immediately, and he turned back to T'Pirai. "You were friends in your childhood, and at the Academy," he said softly.

T'Pirai looked at him again, puzzled. "Irrelevant. This is past. Her actions were scandalous and Council's sentence unequivocal. It would be unseemly to choose to ignore the fact. The bond of friendship cannot be sustained with a Chattel."

"T'Pirai, Sternal knows of what I tell you now. T'Pring is my choice. She has proved herself and has endeavoured to atone for her deed through unfailing duty."

"It is her function. She has done nothing beyond that, my brother."

"She has acted beyond her duties," said Stonn, alluding to an incident that had occurred some months previously.

"It is your concern how you evaluate her actions. The Elders, however, will not permit, her disgrace being known by all. Will you have it said that the wife of Stonn is Chattel, the clanless, cast-off bondmate of another male, property, not even won in honourable Kal-if-fee? Even should you impose your will, she will not be allowed to function as a true mate. Your children by her will be raised by other families of our Clan."

Stonn nodded. He knew it all. "I shall wait. There is time."

"I invade your privacy, brother. T'Piare awaits your decision."

"I am cognizant of this, and consider it regrettable. I have decided in T'Pring's favour. I now ask you to refrain from any further discussion. I only plead with you to grant T'Pring limited contact. The present situation is a source of constant strength, and it is illogical to curtail any individual's usefulness."

She showed the Vulcan equivalent of surprise, then acquiesced. "For thee, my brother, not for the Disgrace of Vulcan." T'Pirai was unrelenting.

* * *

Shortly after preparations were completed and Stonn went to see T'Pring. He found her sitting on the floor in front of the fire-pot, endeavouring unsuccessfully to meditate. She sensed his presence and rose to face him. Stonn noticed she was extremely pale, but said nothing about it.

"Tomorrow you will join Shanak, his mate, another couple, T'Pirai and myself on an excursion to the Sunir region."

The girl nodded, awaiting commands.

"T'Pirai will no longer absolutely adhere to the sentence." Stonn knew that, little though it was, this could fractionally lessen the pressure brought to bear on T'Pring. As he turned to leave again, he saw T'Pring touch a hand to her throat and leave the room quickly, obviously unwell. Stonn waited until she returned, then told her to follow him into the main room after ascertaining that she was functional again.

T'Pirai was scanning a tape, and glanced at the couple with an indefinable expression. She was convinced that her brother was committing a serious error in his indulgence towards T'Pring. T'Anithe's death so many years ago had been

unfortunate in the extreme. She remembered her as a female totally suited to Stonn. Had she not died, the present state of affairs would never have come to pass.

It was, however, a waste of mental energy to consider a hypothetical situation. T'Pirai recalled T'Pring as she had known her from her own experience - entirely logical, quietly dutiful, and faithful to all the codes of Tradition, irreproachable in every aspect.

//I do not actually know what provoked the negative turn of events,// she admitted to herself, and found herself wondering if even marginal acceptance would be possible.

T'Pring noticed T'Pirai's evaluating scrutiny, and immediately adopted the posture of Chattel. Upon seeing this action, which seemed nearly instinctive for the lovely girl, a disturbing thought came into T'Pirai's mind.

//What mental effects must it have to be on a level with an inanimate object, or to owe one's very right to existence to another's mercy? To have no life of one's own? Or to live between two positions in a kind of half-life, ostracized by others yet accepted by the master?//

In the meantime Stonn had begun arranging supplies while T'Pring, who had stood at the door, went to him at his request.

T'Pirai saw that the two valued one another. A glance, expressionless by Human standards, an unnecessary exchange of words - these small details showed that their connection was strong. As things were now, a decision would have to be made soon.

* * * * *
* * * * *

WITH YOU BY MY SIDE

With you by my side
We were mighty,
With you by my side
We were one.
With you by my side
I could turn any tide
And bring peace to each planet, each sun.

Now you have ceased to live
I am empty,
Now you have ceased to live
I am none.
Now you have ceased to live
I have nothing more to give
And the meaning of my life now has gone.

If only you could live again
I would nevermore be lonely,
If only you could live again
I would no longer hide.
If only you could live again
The meaning of my life, my friend,
Would return, with you by my side.

Linda C. Wood

* * * * *
* * * * *

ALL OUR TOMORROWS

by

Vicki Richards

"Councillor Trefayne ready to beam up, Captain," Kyle reported from his station at the transporter console.

"Very good. Energise." Kirk gave the order, and watched while the transporter process began. Spock stood silently at his side, also watching. The Vulcan's curiosity had been even more alive than usual - ever since the message from Starfleet Command had come in. They had been ordered to proceed to Organia immediately, there to take on board the Chairman of the Council of Elders, and from then on to carry out his requests.

A cryptic message at best; and attempts on Kirk's part to gain further information from Starfleet had been unsuccessful. He'd begun to get the idea that Starfleet didn't actually know a lot more about it than the message had stated - but the Organians being who and what they were, naturally any requests made by them were likely to be treated seriously if at all possible.

And Spock agreed with him that it had to be a serious matter. Anything that would prompt Trefayne - or any of the Organian Elders - to leave their world in such a way had to be something out of the ordinary. Why any Organian should bother to leave in a physical form, and on a starship, was a mystery too. Spock had pointed out that, since the Organians had evolved far past the need for physical bodies, and indeed had the capability to be practically anywhere they chose without actually having to bother with such handicaps as having to travel there, the fact that Trefayne had requested they should transport him to an as-yet

undisclosed destination certainly indicated an ulterior motive. Whatever it was, if the Organians thought it important, it had to be serious. Serious enough to mean the galaxy was in danger?

The sparkling shape on the platform coalesced into the recognisable form of Councillor Trefayne, looking almost exactly the same as he had done the last time they had encountered him. But this time the pose of an unwitting, probably ignorant villager unable to defend his people against the Klingons who had threatened them was totally absent. Trefayne appeared as what he was: a highly advanced being capable of exercising incredible power, but with the wisdom and gentleness to use that power sagely. Spock, the eternal observer, had the fleeting impression that the Councillor's expression concealed a sorrow. But then it was gone, and he was stepping from the platform to meet them, smiling in greeting.

"Good day, gentlemen. Captain Kirk - Mister Spock. It is a pleasure to meet you both again." The Organian used the same gesture of greeting his people had used on the last occasion their paths crossed.

"Councillor Trefayne - welcome to the Enterprise," Kirk greeted him. "Though it is a mystery to us why you are here. I hope you'll be able to enlighten us."

"Indeed," commented Spock. "Orders from Starfleet were, shall we say, unspecific. I am curious to know the reasons for our being called here."

The Organian looked at the Vulcan and his smile deepened. "Your curiosity is one of your attributes, Mr. Spock. And it shall be satisfied. But not quite yet. All I can tell you now is that I must ask you, Captain, to set course for a planet in the Agena system. Classified as M-874, I believe."

"Very well, Councillor," Kirk agreed. "We are here to help you in any way we can. But I shall look forward to knowing what this is all about."

Trefayne smiled wistfully, and a strange sense of foreboding settled over Spock. Quickly he thrust it away as unVulcan; the uncharacteristic sensation had unsettled him. But naturally no-one had noticed. His Vulcan mien was as calm and intact as ever.

* * *

Councillor Trefayne retired to the quarters assigned to him, having politely declined the tour of the ship customarily offered to important passengers. Naturally an Organian wouldn't find that necessary; a being so advanced had the ability to 'be present' at many different places in the same instant, and Kirk and Spock knew his present appearance was only for their sakes - Trefayne had no need for a physical body at all, and certainly no need to be transported anywhere by a starship.

"It is indeed illogical for Councillor Trefayne to request we take him to M-874," Spock commented to Kirk as they walked towards the turbolift, "since he has the ability to be anywhere he chooses without resorting to space travel. Organian mental abilities are such..."

"That he can be anywhere he wants just by thinking about it," Kirk finished for him. He knew exactly what Spock was getting at. Not being told why they were doing all this was irritating, to say the least. And Kirk wasn't exactly sure that keeping the Captain in the dark was the best way to run a starship anyway.

"But he must know what he's doing," he thought out loud. "And one thing we can be certain of - the Organians would never interfere if this wasn't serious. Our trivialities don't concern them. The only reason they interfered last time was to stop the Klingons starting a galaxy-wide war. And something about this disturbs me. In a way I'd be happier if it was a horde of Klingons we were fighting."

Spock looked at his Captain and friend thoughtfully as they entered the turbolift; he understood well what it was Kirk really meant. Jim was a man of peace, though naturally he knew how to fight if he had to. The comment about the Klingons was a symptom of how he felt about the way the Organians were keeping them in the dark about what was occurring. Spock understood not just because he understood his friend, but also because it echoed the sensations he was experiencing. Jim would probably say he had a 'feeling' about all this; but a Vulcan would not call it such. It was not an emotion - yet it was nevertheless an instinctive 'feeling' about Trefayne's presence and the reasons behind it. Not exactly a foreboding of danger; more an inexplicable inner knowledge that they were all involved in events likely to prove extremely important, even vital, to the future of the galaxy.

Many, many times Spock had seen how Jim Kirk's instincts had saved the situation; had got them all out of danger on countless occasions. His instincts helped him to be the starship captain he was. And though Spock knew he too had instincts, normally he kept them under firm control. The fact that they were surfacing now to unsettle him in a most unVulcan manner disturbed him, and he had an idea Jim knew it. He never was able to conceal much from his Captain.

"Indeed, Jim," he agreed as they left the turbolift - it was almost an admission. "I, too, will be grateful to reach our destination and discover the purpose to this mission."

Kirk grinned. He did know exactly what Spock meant. "And if Trefayne doesn't tell us then what all this is about, I am not going to order anyone to do anything until he does. Organian or no Organian."

* * *

Two days later they arrived at the designated planet in the Agena system. Its uninhabited surface hung below the Enterprise as if waiting for them. Kirk ordered the starship into parking orbit, and the necessary checks on the planet's composition and atmosphere began.

Trefayne was absent from the Bridge at a time Kirk had expected not to be able to keep him away. It had been a fact that during the journey he had spent most of the time in his cabin; since he had no need of sustenance or Human company that was not too surprising, and both Kirk and Spock had the idea he probably returned to his own natural state of pure energy when not in view of the Enterprise crew. Probably he knew everything that had happened on the starship during the last two days, from command right down to the smallest detail of ship's life. He didn't

need to be present to know what was going on. But Kirk had expected him to be present, in his apparently Human shape, at the moment when they reached the destination Trefayne himself had sent them to.

"Captain - the sensors are detecting unusual fluctuations," Spock reported from the science station. Something in the Vulcan's even tone made Kirk instantly cross from his command chair to the Science Officer's console. He peered over Spock's shoulder to look at the readings on the viewer his friend indicated. He wasn't a science officer, but what he saw there sent shivers down his spine.

Spock apparently had sensed the effect it had had on him. "Indeed, Captain. It is not the first time we have witnessed readings of this type. Ripples in the fabric of time."

That first occasion Spock had spoken similar words, it had been almost cautiously. But there was no doubt in the Vulcan's mind this time; he knew what he had seen on the sensors. He could sense, too, the slight wave of tension which had passed through the other members of the Bridge crew at his words; past experience had taught them the seriousness of the situation.

"Surely not another device like the Guardian, Mr. Spock?" It was Uhura who had spoken. "I know this planet isn't inhabited, but it has been checked out. Anything capable of such power ought to have been detected on the initial survey."

"I agree, Lieutenant," Spock replied. "If these readings had been present when the original survey of this planet was carried out, they would certainly have been detected at that time. Therefore I can only conclude they were not then present. Also these readings are not identical to those produced by the Guardian of Forever."

"Quite correct on both counts, Mr. Spock," said Trefayne. He had suddenly appeared, apparently from nowhere, and was standing directly behind Kirk and Spock at the science station.

Kirk couldn't help frowning at the Organian; he hadn't heard the turbolift doors open, and was convinced Trefayne had arrived on the Bridge by some means of his own. It reminded him forcibly of Trefayne's nature; he was an Organian, far advanced beyond any other beings so far discovered in the galaxy, and in all likelihood only there because some dreadful potential disaster needed to be averted. And the Enterprise was in the thick of it.

He noticed then that Trefayne was looking intently at the Vulcan, as if he was waiting for Spock to say something.

"The readings do, however, remind me of some I have seen on another occasion." Spock spoke as if he knew the Organian was expecting those very words.

The Organian nodded gravely. Then he turned to Kirk, and spoke to the whole Bridge crew. "The reason for this journey will soon become apparent. I must request that you, Captain Kirk, and Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy accompany me down to the planet. I will supply the necessary coordinates for your transporter. There you will discover why all this has been necessary. You have been extremely co-operative so far, gentlemen - and indeed it will take all the patience, understanding and wisdom you have if this situation is to be resolved successfully. Please bear with me a little longer."

Starfleet had ordered him to obey every request Trefayne might make; and as inclined as he might feel to refuse to move another inch unless the Organian finally told him what it was all about, he did not do so. There was something about Trefayne which made him know they all had to do as he wished - if they wished to do what was right.

"Very well - my patience can hold out a little longer," said Kirk.

* * *

Naturally McCoy grumbled about having to 'follow that damned Organian into god-knows-what', but even he didn't protest as much as he might have been expected to. Since Trefayne had come on board a sense of inevitability had

gradually crept over the Enterprise, and over all of them. Inevitability and purpose - as if they were taking part in events beyond their control - at least beyond their control to stop them happening. Annoyed with himself for thinking that way, McCoy did his best to shake himself out of the uncharacteristic mood that had taken hold of him, and went off to join the others in the transporter room, grumbling purely in an attempt to cheer himself up.

The coordinates Trefayne had given them caused them to materialise beneath the planet's crust, in a series of natural underground caves and tunnels.

Though officially classed as able to support humanoid life, M-874 had not been colonised mainly due to a general lack of natural resources; the atrocious weather could have been overcome, of course, but the climate, the barrenness and the thin atmosphere all added together to make the place, if not uninhabitable, certainly undesirable as a potential colony world.

Therefore it had remained uninhabited - or at least so Starfleet had thought. Now they had definite evidence that someone was, or had been, living there, because the quite breathable oxygen atmosphere inside the caverns was clearly being circulated by some mechanical means.

"Okay, Trefayne," Kirk said as he shone the bright light he was carrying into the darkness around them, "I accept you knew we would be able to breathe down here - Spock had detected the anomaly on the sensors before you gave us these coordinates in any case - but don't you think it's time we knew all the facts?"

"Certainly it is, Captain," replied the Organian in his quiet manner. On the starship he had looked totally out of place in his medieval-looking garments, but now, in the dark underground, he looked as if he belonged there, some powerful master of an ancient world. "If we proceed westwards, I believe we will discover the knowledge you seek."

While he knew the Organian wouldn't lead them into danger unless he had no choice, Kirk was becoming exceedingly tired of not knowing what the hell they were walking into. He didn't give the order for them to move until Spock confirmed his tricorder readings showed that was the direction the time-space fluctuations were emanating from.

* * *

"We should be in no immediate danger," Spock told him as they walked along. "Whatever is causing this does not appear to be in operation at the moment. And in any case I suspect one would have to use it in a specific manner to be affected."

It was obvious to Kirk that his friend meant something other than his words stated on the surface. In the darkness of the underground passage he turned to face the Vulcan. "Spock - have you got an idea what it is we're going to find?"

Spock nodded, hardly surprised that Kirk had heard his unspoken reluctance to put his suspicion into words. "Yes, Jim," he replied. "A hypothesis only at this stage, based on the sensor readings I took from the Enterprise; and something else... perhaps you would have a word for it. But I hope this time I am incorrect."

Kirk was almost amused in spite of himself. Spock's suspicions had a habit of being proved right - and if Spock viewed it that seriously, even to the extent of admitting he had a hunch about it...

On most other occasions he might have been tempted to tease the Vulcan gently about it - not as McCoy would, but in a way Spock could easily accept as intended. But not now. The situation was rapidly turning into... well, not exactly a nightmare... but a bad dream. A bad dream where he had to keep fighting an unidentified and unseen foe who would prove the galaxy's undoing if he didn't win.

"What exactly do you think we're facing, Spock?" was all he said.

"We are all about to find out, Captain," the Vulcan replied. "I believe we have arrived at our destination."

Just ahead of them the passage turned a sharp corner; clearly this section was too regular to be naturally formed. Their powerful handlights picked out the shape of a heavy door. Trefayne didn't even bother checking the lock; he merely stared at it, and instantly it began to swing slowly open. Not that the Organian's action surprised them - all three knew full well the incredible power Trefayne's people had at their mental command. Besides, Kirk and Spock had witnessed such an act by the same being once before.

The Organian stepped through the doorway, and immediately the lights went on; another mental command quickly obeyed.

They had been expecting something; but except for Spock, who had suspected, none of them had thought to see the sight which greeted them. And even Spock was hard put to show no sign of either surprise or dismay.

The chamber was lined with scientific equipment; filed computer tapes filled the length of one wall. But the object which had elicited the Enterprise officers' reactions was that piece of equipment which formed the central nexus.

"It's the..." McCoy couldn't get the word out. He wasn't sure he wanted to.

"The Atavachron." Kirk said it for him. Now he understood why Spock hadn't wanted to state his hypothesis out loud. What he didn't understand was how it could be here, now - or one like it. And another encounter with time gone mad was an adventure he could quite well do without; and he knew the same held true for McCoy and Spock. Especially Spock.

"Indeed - I had hoped it would not be," Spock said, stepping forward to examine the device. "But it is not the same one we encountered on Sarpeidon. This is clearly a more advanced model. Though it cannot have been made afterwards... unless Mr. Atoz, having taken his knowledge back into Sarpeidon's past, was instrumental in designing others. But that would create other problems with the time-stream - which Atavachron was truly the first? It also admits the possibility of another Atavachron being active in Sarpeidon's past..." The Vulcan's words trailed off as realisation came to him.

"Yes, Mr. Spock, you are right." Trefayne finally spoke again; he had been silent since they had left the beam-down point. To Kirk it seemed almost as if, now that he had brought them here, he was standing back and watching what happened. As if his part in it was almost over, and the rest was up to them.

The Organian walked up to the Atavachron, and turned to face the Vulcan standing by it. "Yes, Mr. Spock," he said again. "This is truly that same Atavachron built and operated by the tyrant known as Zor Khan."

Kirk looked at Spock. The expressionless facade hid nothing from him. Now he really did understand.

"Then Mr. Atoz' knowledge was instrumental in Zor Khan's creation of this particular device?" Spock questioned the Organian, seeking confirmation of many hypotheses which were rapidly becoming fact.

"Yes," Trefayne confirmed. "The workings of time and fate are strange, and even we do not fully understand them. But we know certain things have to be done at certain points in history to keep the true order. It is ironic that the Librarian of Sarpeidon should have been instrumental in creating Zor Khan's reign of terror - for he was basically a wise man, and a gentle one. He ought to have foreseen the danger in taking records of the Atavachron's design and construction back with him when he joined his family in the past of his world, just after you three escaped your imprisonment in Sarpeidon's past ages. His choice in escaping death when Beta Mobe went nova lay in travelling backwards many hundreds of years. It was long, very long after his death, when Zor Khan discovered the secrets. They had been carefully handed down by Mr. Atoz' descendants as heirlooms of great value. I wonder what the good Librarian would have said to know the tyrant was of his line?"

Spock nodded. It all fitted in. "This Atavachron is clearly of a more advanced design than the one we encountered before. Sarpeidon must have surely

oned a reasonably advanced level of technology before Zor Khan discovered the design, otherwise its construction would have been beyond him. And clearly this Atavachron itself is capable of time travel - its presence here is testimony to that."

"And this one is still operative; ship's sensor readings confirm it... and you only have to look." Kirk indicated the lights and moving display on the Atavachron's rectangular top screen. He felt as if he was coming out of a trance, taking charge of the situation once more, where before he and McCoy had simply been standing and watching as it all unfolded before them, with Spock and Trefayne the only two players. And Zor Khan?

"What about the Tyrant?" Kirk said. The feeling of being a pawn in a galactic chess game was still there, but he put it away from him. If they were all playing some part destiny meant them to, then he still had to make choices, still had to command. Destiny would have to allow them to be his choices. And he couldn't have left Spock to deal with this alone, even if there had been no such thing as duty.

"You know something of his reign of terror," replied the Organian - and now the reason for his sadness had become apparent to them. Great evil and wickedness had caused it - and the fact of it was present, and had to be dealt with; also that they, children yet in the scheme of things by Organian standards, had to be the ones to fight it. Trefayne's sorrow was for them. For the long, hard, necessary striving all races had to go through to achieve what his people had achieved. "Tyrant is a good word for him, and what he did on Sarpeidon. It was a warlike period, and he the most powerful of the warlords. Savagery and technology are a dangerous mixture. With the aid of the Atavachron he gained power, and kept it for a time. You also know of how his enemies disappeared - sending them back in time to isolated, untraceable places was one of his methods. But eventually, as with all whose reigns depend on cruelty, he was deposed. Forced to flee for his life, he used the Atavachron to escape. He set the device's own time-travel mechanism..."

"And came here with it," Spock finished for him. He could see it all now; most of what he had hoped not to find was being confirmed. In all likelihood Zor Khan had done some meddling with the time-stream. But what? So little did they understand the nature of time. So many unproven theories. If, now, they were, or had already been, put into a position where they had no choice but to attempt correction of Zor Khan's interference, the fact that Trefayne had some knowledge of matters as yet not fully understood by the rest of the galaxy would be a great help to them. But it appeared to Spock that Trefayne had no intention of staying; logic told him that Trefayne had brought them here for them to fulfil some purpose, and would remain no longer than was necessary. Dealing with the workings of time was not a prospect the Vulcan relished. It would be so easy to make a mistake; one error in such a situation could be disastrous to the galaxy - to the cosmos.

"You are correct once more, Mr. Spock," said Trefayne, and it was no real surprise to any of them, even though his Human appearance sometimes tended to make them momentarily forget he knew what they were thinking always. "I have completed my part in this; the rest is your task. The three of you must act now to prevent disaster. Zor Khan is newly arrived from his own time period, and about to begin a new campaign of terror. With the power of the Atavachron he could truly cause chaos. You must prevent him."

"But how, Trefayne?" Kirk demanded. "You bring us here without any real explanation, then tell us this. You know we understand the seriousness of the situation due to the brushes we've had with time-travel before. We know how dangerous it is, and that we don't as yet understand its nature fully enough to use it in safety. Perhaps we never will; perhaps we weren't meant to. Not yet, anyway. But you obviously do - more than us, anyway. Why don't the Organians deal with this?"

"It is not our task, but yours," Trefayne explained in the same gentle

manner he always employed. It could be downright infuriating at times. "All beings have their times for learning. We had ours, and we know we must not interfere in the business of the galaxy unless it becomes unavoidable. In bringing you here I have done all I can, all I should, in combatting this threat. The rest is your task. And surely now you can see why I could not tell you before? The very nature of this business decreed that only you three should know, and least for the moment. For safety's sake, it had to be kept as secret as possible."

"But this is ridiculous!" McCoy had finally recovered his tongue after the shock of seeing the machine and discovering what a mess they were in. "You know far more about it than we do - if it's so dangerous, why don't you...?"

"We cannot interfere further, Dr. McCoy." Trefayne held up his hand. "And now I must leave. All I can say is... Mr. Spock, use your logic; and Captain, your intuition. And all of you... do what you sense is correct. Examine the history tapes for clues to a solution. Remember that time is now - and that you are not so much putting things right as doing what has to be done. What was done. Mr. Spock knows a safe place for the Tyrant to end his days. A lonely place."

Then Trefayne performed the blinding transformation from Human form to energy being they had witnessed before, and was, to all purposes, gone.

And Spock was left thinking of that cold, lonely place in Sarpeidon's past.

* * *

The Vulcan's subsequent examination of Zor Khan's Atavachron gave him many insights into its operation. He had never had time to examine the Atavachron attended by Mr. Atoz fully, and that particular machine had been destroyed along with Sarpeidon itself when Beta Niobe went nova. Then they had barely escaped with their lives, and the loss of such scientific knowledge, while regretted, could not be altered, and Spock had believed it had perhaps been for the best; the ability to travel through time could be an immense danger in the wrong hands - even in well intentioned hands if used unwisely. As had been proved by recent events. Zor Khan clearly had to be prevented from causing the chaos he undoubtedly would do if not halted. So while the scientist in him revelled in new knowledge, Spock did not forget the potential disaster the device he examined could cause.

His examination revealed a switch which operated a sliding section of wall; this slid back to reveal what could only be the portal through which one had to step.

"Undoubtedly this portal is the doorway to other ages one must use when travelling independetnly of this Atavachron," Spock commented, knowing full well Kirk and McCoy would not have forgotten the last time they had stepped through such a gateway.

"And if I understood Trefayne's riddles correctly," Kirk said wryly, "or Khan the Tyrant will be coming through it at any moment." The Captain knew as well as Spock the man had to be stopped. He had no liking for tyrants of any kind; cruelty to others was an unforgiveable crime in Kirk's book. "We'll put him in the Brig till we decide what's best to be done with him."

Spock nodded and made no comment.

"I think he's coming," said McCoy warningly; the lights and displays on the Atavachron had increased slightly in intensity.

Kirk drew his phaser and set it to heavy stun. They could not allow him to escape. One such as he could upset the order of things in the cosmos. They were out of their depths as far as understanding the true nature of what they were involved in, Kirk knew; but still it was all up to them.

Two figures almost fell through the portal. A small, ordinary-looking man was holding an old-fashioned projectile firing weapon on a tall, thin woman.

Preconceived notions of what he would look like fled as Kirk saw the cruelty in the eyes of the otherwise inconsequential appearing man; he was undoubtedly the dreadful tyrant, though the only outward signs were the vicious expression he wore and the heavy gold chain round his neck. Tyrants needed some trappings, in any age, no matter what they were masquerading as.

The small man snarled and turned his weapon on Kirk, but the Captain of the Enterprise was quicker, and Zor Khan fell to phaser fire before he could get off a single shot. The woman, now released, instead of showing gratitude produced a knife from somewhere and attempted to stab McCoy, but Spock was there, and a neck pinch rendered her as unconscious as the other.

"Right," said Kirk, taking his communicator from his belt, "I want these two in the Brig where they can do no more harm!"

* * *

"You've completed your study of the Atavachron's history tapes?" Kirk asked.

It was several hours since they had returned to the ship with their prisoners. Truth drug examination had proved the identity of both, and had provided much more information. And it truly was Zor Khan imprisoned behind a force screen in the starship's brig.

"As much as is relevant," Spock replied. "Naturally, a complete study would take a great deal of time."

"Hmmm," Kirk nodded thoughtfully. "And your recommendations?"

"Any recommendations I may have still contain higher elements of chance than I care for, Jim." Spock was standing, arms folded, in front of the desk in Kirk's cabin. McCoy sat in the chair, and Kirk himself was perched on the edge.

The perceptive Enterprise crew had undoubtedly guessed that something serious was afoot, though not exactly what, and due to the nature of the forces they were dealing with all three had thought it better to keep them in the dark. Kirk's order to do so hadn't really been necessary.

"Nevertheless, Spock, please state them," Kirk said. "We have to decide on a course of action, and I've a feeling we ought to make a move soon."

"Indeed. And Councillor Trefayne seemed anxious we should take note of such 'feelings'."

"This whole situation gives me the creeps," commented McCoy. "And your agreeing that feelings count in this is making me even more worried, Spock!"

"None of us like it, Bones," said Kirk. "Whatever we decide, we have to decide right, or the consequences don't bear thinking about."

"That is definitely true, Jim," said the First Officer gravely, "and I am convinced we do have only one course of action."

"Which is?"

Spock paused a moment before continuing. "Study of the Atavachron tapes reveals that the main reason for the downfall of Zor Khan was the opposition of a powerful family firmly dedicated to restoring justice on Sarpeidon; this family was led by a matriarch whom I believe you will recognise. This is a recording I have made from one of the Atavachron's verism tapes." Spock took a computer tape and inserted it into the desktop viewer. Immediately an image of a thin-looking woman appeared; clearly it was their other prisoner. Both Kirk and McCoy gave low whistles of surprise.

"The problem becomes more complicated," Spock went on, "and the solution I am proposing relies heavily on both information obtained from Zor Khan and the other prisoner who is, I believe, called Libarenthe the Restorer in the annals of her planet's history, and on my own ability to operate the Atavachron accurately."

"Those truth drugs made them give accurate information, Spock," said McCoy. "You know that. As much as I hate using the things, I'd stake my career on it. I'm not sure about the history, though; Libarenthe-Whoever didn't exactly strike me as a pacifist."

"Examination under truth drug revealed she believed all of us a threat to her life at the moment she attacked you, Doctor," the Vulcan explained. "She now understands that was not the case. Indeed, were she not a person 'out of time', so to speak, I would recommend that she be released. It would probably do no harm, but at this present time I do not believe it would be wise to take any more risks than we are forced to."

"Then I suppose she has to go back?" Kirk could see what Spock was getting at.

"Indeed. In order to lead the rebellion against the Tyrant. Her part in that is the very reason why he brought her here now. His twisted logic led him to believe that if he did, his tyrannical rule on Sarpeidon would be restored."

"But what about this business of the Atavachron altering basic cell structure? Can they go back?"

"I believe it is perfectly feasible - we can programme the Atavachron to take care of that."

Kirk nodded and stood very silently for a few moments. Spock was right; it looked like they really did have only one course of action. He just hoped they didn't make any mistakes in what they were about to undertake.

"Very well, then. We'll do it. But only you and I, Spock. Bones, I want you to stay here, on the Enterprise. The fewer people traipsing around in the wrong time period, the better."

McCoy didn't reply, only shrugged in accedence. He'd expected as much, and Jim was perfectly right anyway. It was just that he didn't relish the idea of the two of them going off into god-knew-what alone. Again.

Spock looked at McCoy, and again felt that bond which ran among the three of them. It was inexplicable by logic, yet it undoubtedly existed. The Vulcan could well understand how the doctor would not wish to be left behind.

* * *

Spock's examination of the Atavachron of Zor Khan gave them much information they would not have dared to act without, and although - as he had said - it would take a great deal of time to study it in detail, within several hours Spock had gleaned enough knowledge for them to begin the task Trefayne had put firmly on their shoulders. The machine's record tapes, once located and decoded, gave them the exact numbers and locations of those whom Zor Khan had displaced. Libarenthe herself, once the situation had been explained to her, was in total agreement with their decision, and had no qualms about stepping through the time portal when they went through it with her of the first of their journeys.

Those of Libarenthe's kin had been many, and completing their task took Kirk and Spock several days of their lifetimes, though for McCoy, waiting on the Enterprise, only a few minutes passed between each time they stepped through the Atavachron's portal then returned again, having restored yet another to the proper place in time.

It seemed that fate was on their side, for though it was not all easy, still nothing went seriously wrong. It was as Trefayne had said; while they acted on instinct, doing what felt right, all moved along as if in pre-ordained order. Spock replied on Kirk's intuition to guide them in most cases, though he was more that a little surprised that in most cases Kirk's intuitive feelings did not disagree with what logic suggested. But if he was honest with himself, it wasn't the first time he had made that observation.

Finally there was only one more journey to make.

Kirk and Spock stood again before the Atavachron in the underground cave, in their own time period.

"I am not certain if it is possible for us to make an error in this," Spock commented, "if there is an order to time, and taking into account the 'coincidences' we have witnessed."

"You mean if it was all meant to happen, then whatever we do we won't change anything anyway," said Kirk. He was tired; the repeated journeys into Sarpeidon's past time periods had been unsettling, and eventually became disorientating. "I'm not sure I like the idea of that, Spock."

The Vulcan nodded. "I agree. Of course, I may well be wrong."

"You, Spock? I don't believe it!" Kirk laughed out loud. He knew his Vulcan friend had been completely serious this time, but it lightened the moment - and it needed lightening.

"This last journey, Jim - I must undertake it alone," said Spock.

Kirk was surprised - and dismayed. "Trefayne seemed to think you knew where Zor Khan had to be taken... but why must you take him alone? If there's danger - any danger - more than on the other trips, then I want to be there. You may need my help."

Spock nodded his understanding, but he couldn't let Jim come along. Not this time. It was something he had to do alone.

"When we were on Sarpeidon before, Jim, the time period McCoy and I were trapped in..." Spock tried to explain. "There is one more person of Libarenthe's kin to be restored to the correct era."

Then Kirk knew. "Zarabeth? Of course - I should have realised. You're going to leave Zor Khan there?"

The Vulcan eyes were hooded, but Kirk could read the sadness there as Spock silently nodded.

"You don't like doing this, do you, Spock?" said Kirk with understanding. The confrontation with Zarabeth would not be easy for his friend; nor would marooning the Tyrant there, however fitting it was. That cold and lonely place held too many memories for the Vulcan; he should not have had to face them again.

"If you're sure, Spock..." Kirk smiled weakly.

"Yes," said Spock. "I must take him there on my own."

* * *

It was an impatient, dreadfully worried Kirk who waited by the Atavachron while Spock made that last journey. What was Spock going through? And what would he be like when he returned? He should have gone along... But Spock had wanted to do it alone. And he did understand.

In the bone-cold, swirling white world of Sarpeidon's ice age a meeting took place. A meeting which had seemed outside the realms of possibility. And the Tyrant was left there, as Trefayne had surely intended, in that lonely place to which he had once committed another.

To Kirk it was truly only a few minutes that he had to endure the waiting. Through the portal Spock returned, and Zarabeth with him. He turned immediately to re-programme the time machine to return her to the time from which Zor Khan had taken her all those eons ago.

Spock worked quickly, without speaking. He seemed withdrawn, the total Vulcan. Kirk didn't interrupt, but tried instead to have a few words with Zarabeth, but she seemed reluctant to speak, and understandably disorientated.

Then Spock turned and said, "It is time."

Zarabeth went to the portal without hesitation; Kirk couldn't decide if she was reluctant, or if she simply did what she knew she had to do. There was one

word of farewell to Spock, then she stepped through the portal and disappeared. Kirk hadn't been able to read her expression; was it sorrow or regret?

Then there was Spock. Suddenly Kirk was more concerned about the effect all this had had on him, than if they had restored all those people to their proper places. But before either of them could say anything, there was another presence in the cave.

They sensed it before they saw him. Trefayne had returned, and this time he seemed more than a gentle Organian. Now they could really feel the power he held; it emanated from him in tangible waves, and no longer could anyone have mistaken him for an ignorant peasant.

"Do not worry, Captain - neither of you have made any mistakes," said the Organian gently. "All is once more as it should be - or should have been. And consider this. You have surprised us. We already suspected that you had some small amount of wisdom, but the two of you have shown far more than we had believed your species capable of possessing at this time."

"Thank you, Councillor," Kirk replied. All trace of his earlier feelings at Trefayne's refusals to tell them the true nature of their mission had gone. Kirk well understood that the Organian had had no real choice, but that didn't stop him not being quite sure if he liked Spock and himself being used as observable specimens; he was quite sure that that had been a part of it too.

"Yes, Captain Kirk, you are correct. But do not be too harsh on us." Trefayne spoke again, as if he could indeed read Kirk's thoughts - as in all likelihood he could. "This had to be done. Your task here was of great importance. And as I told you, we could not interfere - you had to undertake it. And you have done well. Forgive us for observing, Captain; there are things about your kind we wished to know better. Powerful we may be at our present stage of evolution, and there are many things we understand; but there is also much that we do not. The ultimate capabilities and natures of other peoples is one matter on which we can never be completely certain."

"On that first occasion you visited Organia I deemed it necessary to prevent war between the Federation and the Klingon Empire. I had thought you all warlike and unreasonable. However, even then we were aware of the differences between you, and since then we have observed the galaxy outside with more care. For too long we had turned in on ourselves, secure in our own being, oblivious in many ways of what proceeded in the universe. So we changed, and observed. Perhaps one of our roles is that of giving occasional assistance and guidance to lesser developed beings. I am pleased to say, James Kirk and Spock of Vulcan, that you have not disappointed us. It seems certain that your species have the capability for higher evolution."

"But what of the Atavachron?" asked Spock, always the pragmatist. He seemed unchanged, though Kirk was sure he was going through some kind of inner turmoil. "It is far too dangerous a machine to be left in working order."

"Agreed, Mr. Spock. Therefore I suggest you dismantle it." Trefayne seemed amused about something.

"I will still have the knowledge, Trefayne," said the Vulcan.

"I know, Mr. Spock. And I know you have the wisdom to guard it. I also hope this experience has shown you certain things. Goodbye, gentlemen. No doubt our paths will cross again. Your mission is over - there is no need to take me home." The Organian once again performed the blinding metamorphosis from Human form to energy being and disappeared.

"I think I'd rather travel on a starship," muttered Kirk; then he turned to the Vulcan. Spock looked extremely thoughtful. "You all right, Spock?" The question meant many things.

"Yes, Captain. I believe it should not take me a great deal of time to dismantle the Atavachron. But I must confess I was somewhat surprised that Trefayne should consider me a fit person to keep the secrets of this device."

"I can think of no-one better. But I didn't exactly mean that. Spock... are you all right?"

Kirk was concerned -- more than concerned. Although his Vulcan friend appeared normal on the outside Kirk, who surely knew him better than any other, could see that since he had returned from that last journey he had been, at the very least, distracted. Now he appeared to have recovered--- or had he? And from what? Kirk knew how disturbed Spock had been after that first encounter with Zarabeth, although of course he had hidden all his forbidden feelings about what had happened behind his impervious Vulcan facade. Now, years later, Spock was so much more... at home... with his dual personality. James Kirk did not want all Spock had gained set back by this new encounter. What had happened back there?

Spock looked at him, and appeared to take a deep breath; his inner battle was apparent. Then the mask dropped, and Kirk could see that the gains had not been lost.

"Yes, Jim, I am all right -- truly. Though it is indeed true that I did not find this errand easy."

Kirk was relieved. "Good. Spock, I'm glad you're okay. But you don't have to talk about it, you know."

That very small movement of Spock's mouth, his almost-smile, told Kirk it really was okay. "I believe I should like to tell you about it, Jim."

Kirk nodded, touched by the Vulcan's trust in him.

"This time the Atavachron's programming successfully 'prepared' me for travel into Sarpeidon's ice age, then again so I could return. So it was as myself that I met Zarabeth on this occasion; the factors which were in play last time were not in evidence."

The hidden strain in the Vulcan's eyes was obvious to Kirk; he could see that meeting had indeed not been easy.

"I was relieved to be able to release Zarabeth from her prison in time; naturally, being freed and returned to her proper time was something she had never dreamed could happen. Marooning Zor Khan there was, of course, inevitable and unavoidable. When Zarabeth saw me, at first she could not believe it. Then, when she did, she expected me to be as I was then."

"And you weren't?"

"No." Spock shook his head. "Those feelings I experienced last time were truly caused by the effect of passing through the Atavachron unprepared. On this occasion they were not there. And I say this without denying my Human half."

"I'm glad you're able to accept that half of you, Spock," Kirk said. "Very glad."

Spock nodded his understanding. "When she saw the Tyrant, and I explained the situation, naturally she could see what had to be done. She is still the same person, Jim -- but I am not the same as then. I never was, not in truth. But I was glad to be able to free her."

Kirk could well understand how much of a weight that would have lifted from Spock; he knew how the Vulcan had felt... guilt?... over leaving her there alone, when of course he had never had any choice -- and as he had admitted, it had been Spock acting under the Atavachron's influence who had become involved with her in the first place.

"So a ghost has been laid to rest?"

"Indeed, Jim -- perhaps many ghosts." Spock was thoughtful.

There was the feeling that Spock wanted to say more.

"Trefayne said perhaps we may have learned something," Kirk said, prompting. Whatever it was, Spock had to say it.

"I think he meant I would learn something," said Spock. "And I believe I have. I have learned... I have learned that lesson which you have been trying to teach me ever since we first met."

"Which is?"

"That any feelings I may have, as long as they are mine and not induced by some outside effect, are nothing to be afraid of. Such as friendship."

"That's logical," said Kirk, grinning.

The Vulcan's almost-smile came again. "Perhaps. It is certainly true. And... I am still learning."

"Well," said Kirk, "we've plenty of time." Suddenly he was beginning to feel very glad that this whole business had happened, after all.

"Yes," replied Spock. "All our tomorrows."

* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *

GLOSSARY

SCOTTISH

ENGLISH

Airt	Direction/quarter/point of compass
Ben the hoose	In the inner apartment
Besom	Slut
Birl	Spin round
Blether	Talk nonsense
Canny	Careful
Clamjamphrie	Rubbish/rabble
Clarty	Dirty
Coup (v.) (pron. cowp) (n.)	Overturn Rubbish tip
Cry	Call, to be called, e.g. "What do you cry him?)"
Ding	Hit/deal a blow
Fair	Quite
Forbye	Besides
Gang	Go
Glaikit	Gormless

* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *



JUSTICE SHOULD BE SEEN TO BE DONE

by

Fay Stagg



The buzzer to Kirk's quarters sounded. "Enter," came the muffled reply.

Dr. McCoy sauntered in, and gazing at the figure bending over a half-full suitcase, said cheerfully, "Hi, Jim. Have you decided on the whereabouts of your shore leave yet?"

"Oh, hello, Bones," answered Kirk, looking up from his open suitcase. He grinned. "I have. Just imagine - ten whole days, lying in the sun, fishing, swimming... no-one else around."

"Hmmm! Well, it sounds okay, but knowing your penchant for finding trouble, I'll believe it when you return in one piece in ten days time."

"Such little faith."

"No, Jim. Just plain fact. When did you last have a shore leave that didn't end in disaster one way or another?"

"Well this time, Bones, it's going to be different. You are looking at one James Taylor, unknown to Starfleet or the crew of the Enterprise, who will be minding his own business in the hope that they will do the same."

"Why don't you take Spock?" coaxed McCoy. "He could do with a rest, too."

"No thanks. Spock has a definite antithesis to water, particularly large quantities of it - nothing would induce him to come with me, that I am sure of." He knew full well though that if he had asked, Spock would have said yes, but he hadn't asked. He carried on packing while talking, placing four or five books in his case, then forced the lid shut. Looking up at McCoy he said, "Don't worry, Bones. I'm not."

"That's what worries me," McCoy muttered.

"Well, I must be off. I have an aircar waiting for me at the passenger terminal at Caroda. Spock is remaining aboard for the time being. I gather he is meeting a member of the Vulcan Council on Starbase 12 in four days time. They're discussing computers apparently - some shore leave! Take care of my crew, Bones. I'll be seeing you."

"Yeah, Jim. See you. And... take care of yourself, too," he added quietly as Jim left the room.

* * *

Kirk had already taken leave of Scotty the day before, and having spoken to his First Officer that morning, he expected the transporter room to be empty. But when he arrived he found Spock very much in evidence.

"Something up, Spock?"

"No, Captain. I merely wished to ascertain your exact departure from the Enterprise."

"I suppose you are wondering whether I will change my mind and stow away?" Kirk said provocatively.

"No, Captain. That would be illogical."

"Look after my ship, Spock."

"I will, Captain. And yourself... take care."

Stepping up onto the transporter platform, Kirk smiled at him, partly in farewell and partly in recognition of the last words from his First Officer. He knew such words did not come easily to the Vulcan, which was why they probably held more meaning. "Energise, Mr. Spock."

The shimmer of the transporter ended, and Spock was once more alone in the room. Squaring his shoulders he left and made his way to the Bridge.

* * *

Kirk was rapidly transported down to the main passenger terminal at Garoda, capital city of the planet Ragodan. It was very crowded, and he shouldered his way through, keeping a wary eye on the time. He eventually managed to find the aircar transport that would take him to the shore leave cottage, and after his luggage had been stowed away he clambered into the passenger seat. The journey would take about two hours, and he settled back to enjoy the ride. The car was piloted by an android, so it was not necessary to make idle conversation. Soon the car was airborne and he was skimming over the city rooftops.

He pondered anew his latest Starfleet special assignment. He hated keeping the whole situation secret, especially from Spock and McCoy, but orders were orders. It was to be hoped that things would go according to plan, but Bones' words stuck in his mind - he had to admit that he had a marked propensity for finding trouble, only this time he was out looking for it.

It had all started a couple of months back when he had decided to create an alternative identity for himself. There were often times when his position as a Starfleet officer interfered with his work; often when they came across the rougher element on certain planets the gold uniform itself scared them off. So between himself and Spock they had come up with one James Taylor, a man of ill repute, wanted by Starfleet. They let their imaginations run riot - or rather, Kirk did - and with the Vulcan's unerring guidance they came to the decision that the said Taylor would be involved in 'fraud, malicious brutality and murder'. Having decided on such a course of action they also needed to tie the name Taylor in with the Enterprise, and more particularly with Kirk and Spock, so they implied that Taylor had been involved in the death of Kirk's brother.

Thinking of his brother sent Kirk's mind off on another tangent - a Human prerogative. Once again he felt the total helplessness he had felt when he had found his brother's body on Deneva. He was momentarily swamped with sadness; agreed they had never been particularly close, the age gap was too wide, but Sam had been his big brother, the one he had always looked up to...

Mentally giving himself a shake, Kirk recalled how he and Spock had collated the tape and informed Commander Stone of what they had done. Stone and his office were the only ones other than the library computer on the Enterprise to have a copy. It was there, not for constant use, but just in case one day they should have need of it. Neither of them had suspected that as soon as they had left Stone's office he had immediately started to think to what use he could put the Taylor tape.

In the meantime Kirk had completely put the episode out of his mind. Normal duties had taken over, and it was not until the question of ten days shore leave had cropped up that he received a private message from Stone himself, marked urgent and private. That particular day it had taken a couple of hours to shake off both McCoy and Spock. They had an uncanny knack of hanging around him when he least wanted them in sight, just as if by some sixth sense they knew he was up to something.

He eventually had time to himself that night in his quarters. Locking his door, he had played the tape. He couldn't quite remember the exact words now, for it had been a week ago, but basically it instructed him that she should take his shore leave on the planet Ragodan with the identity of James Taylor.

Starfleet had received communication from two representatives of the Ragodian council to the effect that a member of the U.F.P. was using his position to make personal profit, and was, it was believed, brutalising the local inhabitants.

The man in question was called Sanders, and was some ten years older than Kirk. Stone had supplied him with a tape of Sanders' details. He was similar in build to Kirk, with a youngish face, and in retrospect was exceptionally handsome,

although at the time Kirk had not registered that fact. He had been more taken with the eyes - they had not been the eyes of a happy man.

It was thought that Sanders was the head of a protection society that existed on Ragodan, but to date no evidence had been found to confirm it. He always had an alibi, and his men would seem to be bound either by loyalty or by fear. The idea in Stone's mind was that Sanders might possibly trust a man with Taylor's record, and even admit him into his confidence. Hopefully Kirk would then find enough incriminating evidence to have the man convicted. All Kirk had to do was take shore leave on Ragodan and stay at a certain seaside cottage which stood on land used by Sanders and his men. Sanders would no doubt make contact in some way.

Kirk had agreed; in fact, there was little else he could do. Also he was curious enough to find out more about this Sanders. After speaking to Stone direct, he obtained a tape from the ship's library and settled down to find out all he could about Ragodan.

There was not a lot to find out. Although it was in Federation space, it had held back from accepting membership, not wanting either to commit itself or abstain completely. It was a classic case. Numerous officials had been sent to try and talk the Ragodians into accepting membership, but they had met with no success. Still they refused membership, and no-one knew why. Sanders had been there in that capacity for five years.

The planet itself was of no mineralogical value, although it abounded in rich land and verdant pasture. It would have been ideal for colonisation and settlement, particularly as the Ragodians were not a prolific race. There was land for them, and more. But although the Ragodians never stopped visitors coming, they were never asked to stay, and when their 'time limit' was up they were politely asked to leave. And if they delayed, they would find themselves escorted kindly enough to the nearest transporter area and a waiting passenger ship.

The planet was ideal for shore leave as, being in Federation space, it was easy for 'stop-overs'; it was used regularly by Starfleet personnel, the weather being particularly mild and hostile life negligible. Two suns lit the planet, glowing yellow in the violet sky; the flora varied in colour from lush greens, ambers and yellows to the darkest browns; to Human eyes it was a riot of colour, all the more attractive after being in darkest space for weeks on end.

The Ragodians were exceptionally friendly, but they did not invite settlement of any kind. Many a veteran spaceman on retirement requested permission to settle, but they were always given a firm refusal. So it had become a planet resort, aliens rarely being allowed to stay longer than fourteen days.

Sanders, being an official of the U.F.P., obviously had ambassadorial rights, and so far the Ragodians had not found any legal way of enforcing his removal from their planet. They had not cared to start an inter-world incident by requesting his removal, and in the end one or two of their more forceful council officials had tried other ways. Their bodies were found the following day, incinerated in the charred remains of an aircar. In the end they had sought the help they needed from Starfleet, having no other solution. Kirk wondered again where all this would end.

As he sat there thinking over the last few days, he felt himself relaxing. No doubt Sanders would contact him, but in the meantime he had his shore leave on an idyllic planet. Hopefully, he would get a few days enjoyable leave in first. Looking through the window of the aircar he could see the Crystal Sea not far away. Time had passed quickly while he had been lost in thought, and he leaned forward eagerly. The pale silvery sea contrasted vividly with the violet sky. Definitely this shore leave would have compensations.

Eventually the aircar came to a halt and hovered gently in front of a small isolated cottage. Ordering the android to set the car down, Kirk alighted, and breathing in the fresh, fragrant air went straight to the door of the cottage. Fumbling in his pocket for the keys he let himself in; it was clean and spacious,

although slightly musty from having been locked up for some time. He quickly opened all the windows, and shouted to the android to bring in the food parcels and his other hand luggage.

Soon it was all piled up in the main living area, and noting the food packs, he smiled to himself. Having left Spock to arrange it because he had been so busy with last-minute details regarding the Enterprise and her crew, he could see that the Vulcan didn't intend him to starve. Even when he was away from the Enterprise, Spock still managed to make his presence felt.

He turned back to the android and ordered it to return in five days time with more fresh produce. He didn't even notice it leaving, or hear the throbbing noise of the aircar engines as it took off and disappeared.

Instead, he gazed in delight at the ocean, instantly deciding to have a swim. Stripping off, he considered searching through his luggage to find his swimming trunks, then laughing to himself he peered out of the door at the empty landscape and then ran down to the water's edge. Wading until he came to deeper water he dived in, marvelling at the clarity of the water - no wonder it was called the Crystal Sea. Cutting his way swiftly through the waves he let his body relax and feel the coolness against his skin. He didn't emerge for an hour or more, then lay on the silvery sand until he was dry.

Much later he went back into the cottage, and slipping into an old pair of denim trousers he padded about the cottage in his bare feet. He cooked himself something to eat, amazed at his hunger, then picking up a book he took his coffee over to the comfortable-looking sofa and slumped down. He read for a long time until the night sky had darkened and he could no longer see the words clearly. Snapping the book shut, he made for the sleeping quarters; the bed proved to be as comfortable as the sofa, and soon he was asleep.

* * *

The following days passed in much the same manner. So far he had no contact with Sanders, and had barely seen anyone near the cottage at all. If Sanders didn't appear soon his time limit would be up... Still, Stone had known that this could happen, and was preapred for nothing to come from this plan.

In the meantime Kirk glowed with health, his tan deepening daily, his hair bleaching more golden in the strong sunlight. The 'droid returned with more supplies, and thankfully with more reading matter - it would call in another five days to take him to Caroda, and eventual return to the Enterprise. If this shore leave continued in this way, then boy oh boy, were Spock and McCoy in for a shock! They just didn't think he was capable of having a safe shore leave. Perhaps this time he could prove them wrong.

That night was very hot and humid, and he slept naked, with the window open. Waking suddenly at 3.00 a.m. he swiftly moved off the bed. Going to the open window he gazed out, and could see nothing - yet something had wakened him. He shivered slightly, closed the window, and donning his bathrobe, decided to have a coffee, knowing from experience that once he had woken like this nothing would bring sleep again until the following night. He sighed; it came with the job - red and yellow alerts in the middle of the night played havoc with a decent sleep pattern.

Going softly into the main living area, sensing his way in the darkness, he crossed into the kitchen. Preferring moonlight to that given by the electric light he took hold of the kettle, then froze. His acute senses told him that he was not alone - something or someone was in the main living area. His heart lurched painfully in his chest, but before he had time to react the cottage was ablaze with light.

The sudden light not only dazzled him but startled him, and he dropped the kettle, which made the most resounding noise in the still of the night. He could barely believe what his vision revealed to him. At first sight the main living area seemed full of men, each with a torch in one hand and a levelled phaser in the other. By the time his eyes had adjusted to the light he realised

that this was a gross exaggeration. There were six men, roughly dressed in dark clothes, all standing, phasers levelled. There was also one seated man, instantly recognised by Kirk. So contact had been made.

Sanders remained seated; he was holding a long whip in his hand, and was slapping it gently against the leather of his boots. He flicked his hand at one of the men, who immediately put on the main room lighting. One by one the others turned off their torches.

Kirk felt a phaser shoved into the small of his back, propelling him forward towards the seated man. Feigning anger, he demanded, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Sanders smirked. "We are official representatives of the U.F.P. We are..." he hesitated, "investigating trouble in this area. You have the name of trouble."

Kirk gromaced to himself. Obviously Sanders had checked him out already. Endeavouring to try and take hold of the situation, and also feeling slightly nervous of those levelled phasers, he sat down on the sofa opposite Sanders. Speaking more calmly, he said, "What makes you think I'm trouble?"

"We have notice that one James Taylor is staying at this cottage. We have seen the Starfleet tape - you are he. You have quite a record, Mr. Taylor."

Kirk nodded his head in agreement, using all the charm for which he was renowned. He sat back on the sofa. "Your men don't have to stand there aiming their phasers at me," he said pleasantly. "I'm not going anywhere. I don't understand why you came in the middle of the night, though?" And his eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

Sanders gazed at the man before him. His brain was seething with conjecture. He knew Taylor's history, and had been tempted, very tempted indeed, to get to know this man, possibly even one day taking him further into his confidence. But there was something... something that was preventing him... yet that something remained elusive. Perhaps it was because Sanders had ever been a man who stood alone, and he could not change now. And now, coming face to face with Taylor, he realised that he would never ever confide in this man. He could see in Taylor his own reflection, the quiet confidence and casual assurance of a man who knew what he was doing and where he was going. Therefore the only solution was to take complete and absolute charge of the situation.

Kirk waited patiently for a reply to his question. But when one didn't come, and he could feel Sanders eyes on him, he relaxed even more, although inside he was as tense as a bowstring. Unfortunately he was not to know that his natural charm of manner would do him no good here. Sanders had already made up his mind, and so ignoring Kirk's question completely, he said,

"We have information that the USS Enterprise will be in this sector within 48 hours. No doubt they will be pleased to have you aboard their ship."

Kirk dropped his eyes quickly.

Sanders, mistaking the reason for it, said, "Yes, Taylor, the Enterprise. You don't like the sound of that, do you? I have no doubt that Captain James Kirk will be delighted to have you aboard his ship."

"You can bet on it," muttered Kirk.

"I gather from the tape that you were responsible for his brother's death. Tut tut. Yes, he will be delighted to meet you."

Kirk allowed his eyes to meet Sanders' directly, and tried one last shot. "Surely we can come to some arrangement?"

The laugh that escaped Sanders' lips was not a pretty sound. "Arrangement?" he spat out. "Why should I make any sort of arrangement with the likes of you?"

"Most people I have come across seem prepared to accept... rewards."

"Have they? How very fortunate for you! How very unfortunate that at last

you have come up against someone who won't!"

Kirk could see Stone's plan fading away by the second. "I still don't see why U.F.P. representatives come calling in the middle of the night."

"Silence! You ask far too many questions." And turning to the nearest two men he snapped, "Tie him. Any trouble and we shall have to punish him."

Kirk realised now that for some reason Sanders was insanely angry - a cold and silent anger, all the more deadly - and his stomach twisted further into a hard knot.

One of the men took his arm to tie his hands behind his back, and Kirk pulled away violently, ready to fight now.

Sanders swung back. "For that," he said with barely concealed anger, a sadistically malevolent gleam in his eyes, "you will be punished now. Strip him!"

Kirk fought then, but the outcome was bitter and obvious. He was finally stripped of his robe and forced to his knees in front of Sanders. While the two men held him down Sanders handed his whip to another and stood back to watch. Kirk was lashed repeatedly, again and again. To start with he flinched at every stroke, but in the end his back and shoulders were just one searing agony. Moaning incessantly now, still he was allowed no respite. Kirk's inordinate sense of the ridiculous remained until the end, though. Bones had been right, as usual; and so much for his all-over tan - it wouldn't even be recognisable.

Fortunately for him, the Human body can only take so much punishment, and eventually he slipped thankfully into the darkness of unconsciousness.

* * *

The USS Enterprise was in orbit around Starbase 2. Spock had taken farewell of the Vulcan official. Although he would never have admitted to enjoyment of any kind, he did admit to McCoy that the meeting had been both stimulating and interesting; McCoy knew exactly how to take that.

Spock was in his own quarters when Lt. Uhura came through on the intercom. "Mr. Spock, I have an urgent call coming through from the U.F.P. ambassador on Ragdan."

Spock tensed. "I'll take it here, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

He sat quietly and listened to Sanders' report. Gazing at the viewer he looked into the face of the 'archvillian' James Taylor. He sighed. He had not known that Jim was using that name on leave. Touching the intercom, he called for Dr. McCoy and Commander Scott to come to his quarters.

Minutes later they arrived. Spock explained how the ambassador had picked up a known murderer, and was waiting for the Enterprise to come and collect this dangerous being, particularly as they were due there in 48 hours, anyway.

"Who is he, Spock? I have files on all known murderers, their F.F.G.'s too - it's standard. Do I know him?"

Spock sighed again. "Unfortunately, Doctor, we all know him," and he silently moved the viewer around to face them. "James Taylor, gentlemen."

Scotty just gulped and stared. McCoy was absolutely furious, and reacted immediately. "I knew it, I just knew it! That man is incapable of taking a break without getting into trouble! I knew one of us should have gone along. This is your fault, Spock - you and your dislike of water. And it's no good you raising an eyebrow at me. You know what Jim's like. And what is this 'Taylor' nonsense, anyway?"

"It was an arrangement - Jim and I planned it months ago. It was not relevant to this shore leave, or so I believed. He thought at that time that he needed another identity, one also that would be a code word between him and me. At times Jim's official capacity hinders his work - it was thought ideal to give

him a criminal record. There should have been no problem. Commander Stone has one tape, and we have the other." Spock considered for a moment, and then flicked the intercom switch.

"Lieutenant Uhura?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Did Captain Kirk receive within the last few weeks a message either from Commander Stone or his office?"

"Why yes, he did -- about ten days ago. It was marked urgent and confidential."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Spock out."

He steepled his fingers as he was prone to do in times of thought. "It would seem, gentlemen, that our Captain has not been entirely honest with us about this shore leave."

"That, Spock, is an understatement. I had an idea he was up to something a few days back, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Had the feeling he was trying to avoid me."

Spock did look up quickly then -- he too had for a few hours gained the same impression, but then Kirk had seemed his usual self, and Spock had dismissed it from his mind. He would know next time to trust his own initial judgement. If there was a next time.

"Well," interrupted Scott, "it sure looks as though his plan has backfired."

"Not necessarily, Mr. Scott. We are not aware of the Captain's orders regarding Ragodan, and until we do know, any discussion is merely supposition."

"We shall have him aboard soon then, Spock?"

"Yes." He flicked the intercom again, and asked for Lt. Sulu.

"Sulu here, sir."

"Heading Ragadon immediate -- warp seven if possible."

"Yes, sir."

"You'll have it, Mr. Spock," Scott promised as he vanished out the door.

McCoy remained behind, looking at Spock. Knowing how monosyllabic the Vulcan could become at times, he merely said quietly, "He will be okay, Spock, won't he?"

"I hope so, Doctor. I sincerely hope so."

* * *

In the meantime Kirk had regained consciousness. He found himself tied securely to the iron fencing surrounding the back yard of the cottage. His arms were wrenched tightly behind him, his back aflame. The midday suns were beating down mercilessly; he found no respite, and would receive none until the shadows moved over to where he was slumped.

Instead, trying desperately to ignore his bodily discomfort, he craned his neck around trying to see and hear what was going on. He could hear talking and much coming and going, and it appeared there were a lot of Ragodians about, most of them looking absolutely terrified and subservient. He watched them as they came and went; the six men who had been with Sanders the night before were usually within sight, either roughly pushing the Ragodians, or in more instances striking out.

Kirk had been dressed in his trousers and shirt, but he had nothing on his feet, possibly to stop him travelling far should he make an escape. Eventually two of the men came out bearing a bowl of food and a flask of water. They untied Kirk's arms at the back, but he couldn't move them -- the cramp tightened up the muscles instantly, and for minutes he was in sheer agony.

It amused the two men to see their prisoner writhing on the ground, and they made no effort to help him. Eventually they dragged him back to the fence and

tied his wrists together again, at the front this time, and also secured him to the fence. The food and water were left beside him, and they returned to the cottage.

It took some time for him to eat the food, the men having been very thorough in tying his wrists. Actually he wasn't very hungry, but he was terribly thirsty. Trying to drink from the flask seemed nigh impossible, and much went down his shirt or was wasted on the dirt. Afterwards he felt exhausted, and soon sleep overtook him.

Over the following 36 hours his treatment did not improve, although it was obvious that Sanders had every intention that Kirk would at least be fit to walk when the Enterprise entered orbit. Every hour he would be made to walk, and if he stumbled then Sanders or one of his men made a game of tripping him even more. The more he suffered the more it seemed to delight Sanders and his men.

His head ached dully from the brightness of the suns, and he knew he was also suffering from heat exhaustion; his last few days of soaking up the sun had stood him in good stead, for otherwise he would by now have been suffering greatly with sunstroke. Even so his eyes were sore, and the insistent throbbing in his head made him feel even more depressed.

He realised at last when they came to untie him again that the Enterprise had arrived. Sanders was standing some distance away talking into a communicator. Kirk was pushed, pulled and dragged away to the solitary man. Sanders turned and looked maliciously at the dishevelled man.

"The Enterprise is now in orbit. They are waiting for your arrival. It would appear that unfortunately Captain Kirk is not aboard. A pity... I am sure he would approve of your being humbled. However, the Vulcan First Officer is prepared to receive you."

The two men by Kirk's side were only holding him loosely, and Kirk swung away, kicking feebly at his guards; he did not want to appear to be too eager to be transported aboard. Sanders just laughed, looking at the struggling man. He moved over to him, and dragging Kirk's head up by the hair, punched him in the face, sending him over backwards sprawling in the shingle. Two of the guards came hurrying up and dragged him to his feet again, holding him while Sanders punched him again and again in the stomach.

Kirk could barely stand; he was retching and trying desperately to drag in gulps of air. He could taste blood on his lips, and mentally prayed that McCoy would not be in the transporter room. He would not be able to contain his concern, that Kirk knew.

He vaguely heard Sanders give the order for transportation, and felt the familiar transporter effect. Seconds later he was standing on the platform of his own ship. He could feel the gentle throb of her engines through the soles of his bare feet, and with that he could feel the fear and depression physically drain away. He was back now where he belonged, and things could only improve. He sensed Spock's presence, but did not look up. He also knew that Spock was alone with the two security men.

Spock greeted Sanders in his usual formal manner. He barely looked at the prisoner - or so it appeared to Sanders, who little knew that the Vulcan had instantly taken in the bruises and the split lip. His stomach had tightened into a knot, but at no time did he reveal that in either his face or stance.

Ordering the security men to take the prisoner away to the holding cell, he asked Sanders if he would care to accompany him. He talked normally to the man, walking a few paces behind Kirk and the two guards.

"It would appear that you had some trouble subduing your captive, Mr. Sanders.

"You can bet we did," the other replied. "He fights like a demon."

They eventually came to the holding cell and both the Vulcan and the security men entered with Kirk. Spock stood directly in front of the prisoner.

"James Taylor, due to your many crimes you will be detained aboard the Starship Enterprise until you have been handed over to the authorities at Starfleet Command."

Kirk didn't bother to raised his eyes to the Vulcan's face. He was not sure that he could meet that steady gaze with indifference. But he did say, for effect and hoping it would reach Sanders, who was waiting in the corridor, "Go to hell!"

Spock knew his Captain well, and played along. "That is as may be, but I believe our Captain will be particularly pleased to have you aboard." He then withdrew from the room, ordering the forcefield to be activated, and also positioning two more guards further along the corridor.

Sanders, ntoicing this, commented, "You do not, it would appear, intend Taylor to escape." Although privately, he thought both the extra security guards rather small for their job. He doubted they would stop many men bigger than themselves - different indeed from the two who stood directly in front of the holding cell. He didn't know that the two extra guards were more used to wearing the gold of Command than Security red. Spock, taking no chances with his Captain's life, had placed both Sulu and Chekov within seeing distance of the holding cell.

Spock tapped the intercom after nodding slightly to Sulu. "Commander Spock to Sickbay."

"Yes, Mr. Spock?" came Nurse Chapel's voice.

"Dr. McCoy please, Nurse."

"Yes, sir."

"Spock. McCoy here. What's up?" He knew full well what was 'up', but Spock had given them their course of action to follow in order to allay any suspicion Sanders might have. Jim had, after all, taken on this masquerade for a reason, and it was up to all of them to see it through no matter what the cost.

However, Sanders was not in the least suspicious. He was sublimely confident that he now stood in good stead with the renowned James Kirk - or he would do. He liked the idea of a Starship Commander being grateful to him, particularly the legendary James T. Kirk. He listened idly to the conversation on the intercom.

"The prisoner James Taylor is now in number one holding cell; he will need attention."

"On my way," came the gruff reply.

Spock, knowing that Jim would soon be in McCoy's capable hands, quietly showed Sanders the way back to the transporter room, saying diffidently, "I will not detain you, Mr. Sanders. I feel sure you are a very busy man."

"Yes, Mr. Spock, I am. Err... your Captain, James Kirk... I understand he has wanted Taylor for a long time."

Spock gazed at him speculatively for a moment. "Yes, I believe that is so. Certainly he will be relieved to know that he is aboard this ship."

"Well," Sanders smiled, holding out his hand, "perhaps some day I will meet your Captain in person."

"Yes," replied the Vulcan, somewhat drily, ignoring the outstretched hand completely. "He will be pleased to meet you, I would imagine."

Sanders, realising that the Vulcan was not going to shake his hand, quickly dropped it. He coloured up slightly, feeling a little foolish, and he looked at the Vulcan again with something bordering on dislike. For some reason he was getting an impression that the Vulcan did not like him. Knowing his own two men were also watching and had probably noticed the slight, he took the stand ready to be just as icy as the Vulcan. Then he remembered. Of course - Vulcan did not

like physical contact with anyone, and never showed any emotion. Having established that in his mind, he managed to find a smile.

"Well, goodbye then, Mr. Spock." He motioned to his two men to join him on the transporter stand.

The Vulcan just nodded as Sanders and his men disappeared. Minutes later the room was empty. Spock was moving swiftly down the corridor to the turbolift, making his way to the holding cell. He started to break into a run, and nearly collided with Sulu, who was waiting with his phaser raised. Sulu dropped his arm immediately, and stood out of the way.

Spock entered the cell to find the doctor already beside the Captain's unconscious body. Spock too came to his knees beside him, looking quickly at McCoy, he took the limp wrist. He could feel the strong steady pulse, and closed his eyes momentarily in thankfulness.

McCoy, however, was running his mediscan over Kirk, and wasn't liking his readings at all. "Spock, move him over, gently."

He pulled the Captain over into a more normal position; the tattered shirt fell open and revealed to the doctor's and Spock's appalled gazes a mass of cuts, bruises and weals criss-crossing the shoulders and chest. It had been a wonder that Kirk had ever managed the walk from the transporter room to the holding cell. Now it was not surprising that he had fainted.

"What on earth did they do to him?" McCoy whispered in sheer horror. "We'd better get him to Sickbay."

Spock gently lifted Kirk up, and after settling the weight in his arms, strode over to the entrance to the cell.

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted one of the new security guards, barring his way, "but surely the prisoner should remain in the holding cell?"

"Yes, sir," agreed the other, moving up beside him, phaser at the ready. "What will Captain Kirk say if he should escape?"

Spock gazed patiently at the two men barring his way. He had forgotten that these two had been selected for this duty because they were new and had never met their Captain. He answered quietly, "This is Captain Kirk," and nodding to Sulu and Chekov, who had been hovering anxiously, he left them both to explain to the bewildered guards while he and McCoy hurriedly took Kirk to Sickbay.

* * *

Twelve hours later Spock entered Sickbay. McCoy was nowhere to be seen, and the Captain appeared to be asleep. Spock hesitated at the doctor's office, his acute hearing having picked up the sound of the doctor dictating into his recorder. Spock changed his mind, and went over to his Captain's side.

His eyes wandered over the sleeping man, taking in the bruises covering the arms and chest and shoulders. The doctor had strapped his chest up, so presumably there were broken ribs too. Suddenly he realised that a pair of hazel eyes were gazing at him.

"How are you feeling, Jim?" he asked, realising too late that he had used Kirk's given name, something he rarely did.

A smile touched Kirk's lips. "Bit rough... but at least I managed six days leave. Spock, that Sanders..."

"Is a very strange man," replied the Vulcan.

"There's nothing strange about him - he's just a sadist," snorted McCoy, who had come over, having seen Spock through his office window.

"And sadism isn't strange, Doctor?" enquired Spock, eyebrow raised.

"No, it isn't - it's far worse. Okay, Jim, what on earth did you do to warrant all this?"

"Nothing!"

McCoy looked smug. "There you are, I was right. You don't have to find trouble. It finds you... Hmph!"

His unrepentant patient chuckled, and then groaned, clutching his chest. "Ohhh -- that hurts!"

"Serves you right!" retorted his unsympathetic doctor.

Kirk looked at his First Officer again. "You don't have much to say, Spock," he remarked drily.

Spock gazed solidly at the opposite wall. "I have plenty to say, Captain, but I feel it would be better left until you are more fit."

"Rubbish," Kirk said as he struggled to sit up. "Well, help me then, damn you!"

"No," McCoy said brusquely, his concern becoming apparent as he watched the perspiration break out on his friend's forehead. "You just lie still."

"I said hep me up! That's an order!" snapped Kirk, trying not to lose his patience.

Spock and McCoy exchanged glances. Realising their stubborn commander was liable to cause more damage if they didn't help, they both instantly took an arm. Kirk swung his legs off the bed and just sat. Taking a deep painful breath he said,

"That's better. You two always have me at a disadvantage when I'm flat on my back."

Taking the line of least resistance, McCoy ordered coffee for all three, and taking the nearest seat, plumped himself down into it. Spock leaned against the bed opposite, ready to come to Kirk's aid should he need it.

"Well, Jim, we're all ears," McCoy said, and grinned at the frozen look on Spock's face. He added for effect, "Some of us more than others."

A smile flickered over Kirk's face. "That's what I need," he said, catching sight of a yeoman carrying a tray of hot coffee.

"What, ears?" muttered McCoy to himself. "Oh, the coffee. Well, I shouldn't drink any yet. It will be too hot, and if you start coughing you're going to need more pain killers."

"Okay, Bones, be done with the lecturing," Kirk said, placing the full cup of coffee on the side table. He gazed at his two officers, seeing the concern reflected in their eyes. For a split second he couldn't think where to begin.

Eventually Spock broke the silence. "Did you go down to Ragodan as James Kirk or as James Taylor?" He already knew the answer, but somehow wanted Kirk to admit it to him.

Kirk, gnawing at the side of his lip, noticed the disapproval behind his First Officer's question. It still annoyed him that Stone had forbidden even Spock to be in on the plan. Before he could answer, however, McCoy joined in.

"Taylor, of course."

Spock turned and looked at the doctor. "How do you know?" he queried. Both Kirk and McCoy thought they sensed the hurt behind that question.

Kirk stepped in quickly. "I'm sorry, Spock. I told him without thinking -- it was a slip of the tongue." He remembered that at the time he had cursed himself for mentioning it, but on further thought had known that the doctor would have dismissed it instantly as just another of the Captain's quirks.

"You see, Stone needed inside information on Sanders. He had been contacted by certain officials from Ragodan, who told him that Sanders was running a very effective protection system, and that most of the minor and quite a few of their

top officials were so deeply involved in it that they went in fear of their very lives. No-one could be persuaded to turn in evidence because of a very real fear of reprisals. Stone immediately thought of the tape we had given him, and hoped I would be able to gain Sanders' confidence. Of course, having met the man now, I realise it was obvious that I wouldn't."

He took a deep breath, and a sudden sharp pain seared through him. Trying to hide it - and incidentally failing miserably - he reached out for his coffee, but he could see his hand shaking. Spock moved forward and placed the cup firmly in his hand. Kirk could feel the steady gaze, and knew that not once did Spock's eyes leave his face. //They're watching me like hawks,// he thought to himself. There was nothing he wanted more than to lie down and sleep for ever, but this had to be discussed now.

McCoy, too, was on his feet. "Well, Jim, this can all wait."

"No, Bones, it can't," Kirk said. "This has to be discussed now."

McCoy looked exasperated at the determination in Kirk's pain-filled voice. Kirk, noticing that look, ignored it. He reached over and pressed the intercom; another shooting pain ran through him, and he could feel the perspiration once again breaking out on his forehead.

His voice ragged now, he said, "Kirk to Bridge."

"Yes, Captain?"

"Uhura?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Get me Commander Stone - visual if possible. And scramble. Urgent."

"Yes, sir."

Spock reached over, switched the intercom off, then took the empty cup from Kirk's hand. "I must confess, Captain, that at first Commander Stone's involvement did not occur to me."

McCoy had sat back down again and was muttering to himself. At that point he looked up. "Stone has a lot to answer for."

"Oh, Bones," Kirk said impatiently, "I doubt he thought this would happen."

The intercom buzzed and Uhura's voice came over the air. "Commander Stone, Captain. I'm sorry, no visual - it is too distorted."

"Never mind, give me what you can."

"Hi, Jim," came Stone's voice. "Cut your leave short, then?" came the hopeful query.

"Yes, Commander - I had it 'cut' for me," Kirk replied clearly and precisely.

"What do you mean?"

"I suspect you already know. Sanders is certainly running something down there - I just wasn't allowed to stay around long enough to get exact details. There will be a report coming to you as soon as possible."

"What happened?" came the brusque reply.

Before Kirk could answer McCoy swivelled the intercom around and said heatedly, "I'll tell you what happened, Commander. Our Captain has been returned to us with cracked ribs, multiple bruises, cuts and internal bleeding - and considering he was on shore leave, very little tan showing through!"

Kirk grinned ironically - so McCoy had noticed some of the tan.

"Doctor McCoy, I shall want a full report and tape of all injuries."

"You'll get 'em!" McCoy answered, turning the intercom back to Kirk.

"Look, Jim, I'm sorry. I didn't intend this to happen, as you know. I never

expected Sanders to react in this way. Presumably he didn't want any extra involvement elsewhere." He considered for a moment. "Perhaps this can still be put to good use. Jim, I want you to keep a low profile. We'll haul Sanders in now, and with your evidence - which I'd like you to bring personally - we may just be able to wring a confession from him, if we play our cards right. But it is imperative that he still believes you to be Taylor."

"He does," Kirk said quietly. He was feeling decidedly nauseous by now, and knew that if he didn't curtail this discussion soon, he was going to fall off this bed flat on his face. "Okay, but surely they have my real tape?"

Stone chuckled. "He does, but no visual - we did quite a bit of doctoring on Ragodan."

"You seem to have been well prepared," voiced Spock at last.

"Okay, Mr. Spock, I can sense your disapproval. However, the tape was originally your idea, and you must have realised that this is the sort of thing that might have happened."

"Agreed, Commander, but in essence then I should have been informed."

Stone was silent for a moment. "Perhaps you are right," he sighed. "I'm sorry - this Ragodan problem has assumed nightmare proportions. We need planets like Ragodan to join the U.F.P., but they won't, not while we have corrupt officials. Look, we can discuss this more fully later, and I have much to do. Hope you feel better soon, Jim. Stone out."

Silence filled the room, but nevertheless they had all heard the note of sincerity in Stone's voice. And perhaps both Spock and McCoy relaxed slightly because of it. Neither had liked to think that a Starfleet Commander would deliberately send an officer into a possible 'death' situation.

Spock once more leaned over and flicked the intercom off. Looking at Kirk's face, he could see that he was not far off collapsing completely. He moved forward, followed by McCoy, and Kirk looked up, gazing at them both blankly.

His vision was distorted now; Spock seemed to be out of proportion to everything else, looming very large in front of him. He felt something pressing on his shoulders; it seemed a huge weight, but it was only McCoy's light grip, and his voice was coming through as though amplified.

"C'mon, Jim, jus' you lie down."

He closed his eyes and felt the same hands helping him, but he was practically comatose. The incessant pain in his chest and head were keeping him just over the level of consciousness. He heard the slight hiss as a hypo touched his arm, then no more.

* * *

A week later the Enterprise was in orbit above Earth. Kirk was staying with Commander Stone, along with his First Officer and Dr. McCoy. It had seemed very strange being back on Earth after so many months. They were confined to Stone's home, but they were entertained well.

On the second day of the trial, Kirk had to attend as a witness. Spock and McCoy would be there, although it was doubtful that they would be called to give evidence.

The courtroom was vast, and crammed full with people. The media had picked up the story, and scanners were in evidence everywhere. The jury was made up of representatives of the U.F.P., none of whom Kirk recognised. Sanders was in the dock with his men - Kirk recognised them all instantly. He could feel the malevolent gaze as it fixed on him when he first walked into the courtroom. Obviously Sanders realised just who had pulled the plug on his lucrative schemes.

Kirk was dressed somberly in black trousers and t-shirt, handcuffed between two Starfleet Security men. The trial dragged on interminably, and Kirk's

initial interest was waning, particularly as he had heard a lot of the evidence before. Also the handcuffs were chafing his wrists; a couple of times he had forgotten he was wearing them, and would move one hand, jerking the other painfully. He was still recovering from the treatment meted out by Sanders.

Eventually the evidence of James Taylor was brought up. Sanders was given an opportunity to explain why and how they had found the witness. Sanders maintained that the only reason they were on the land in question near the cottage was because they had received notification that James Taylor was hiding out there, and they had gone there for no other reason than to apprehend this wanted man. Sanders was a born raconteur. It looked as though he had the jury, the media and the spectators eating out of his hand; the courtroom was as still as a grave as everyone listened intently.

The prosecution relied heavily on Taylor's evidence. But to the public at large, it was a U.F.P. ambassador against a known murderer. It would not take much to sway the jury. But Stone did have a trump card, and he would keep that to the very last.

Stone had himself taken the stand as prosecutor, and turning to Sanders, he said, "Mr. Sanders, you say you went to this cottage to apprehend James Taylor. I would be interested to know where this information came from. Perhaps you would tell the court?"

Sanders answered promptly. "One of my men has contacts on Ragodan; it was brought to his attention, and he passed the information on to me."

"And you don't know the name of the contact?"

"No, I do not."

"Tell me, is it always your policy to beat Federation prisoners?"

Sanders had always known that he would be held responsible for that moment of pique. For some reason Taylor had irritated him, and he had ordered his men to carry out the whipping, something they had done for him many times before, but never with such far-reaching results. For that one slip of judgement he truly believed he would not be in court today. He answered abruptly.

"That man," pointing directly at Kirk, "is a known murderer. He resisted capture - my men had to restrain him somehow."

"But is it not true that he was forcibly held down and was whipped repeatedly until he lost consciousness, and that he was ill-treated the following day?"

Sanders contemplated the handcuffed man, meeting Kirk's gaze head on, trying to weigh up in his mind whose evidence carried more weight. As things stood at the moment, he believed the scales tipped in his direction, and he would use every ounce of that.

"Yes, Prosecutor, he was beaten. I... I knew of his record, and... of the pain and misery he has brought to many." He paused for effect. "I know it was wrong, and I am and ever shall be bitterly ashamed that I allowed myself in one moment of disgust to carry out such punishment." And Sanders bowed his head, regret showing in his bearing.

Kirk could not help but shudder; he remembered the positive gleam of delight in Sanders' eyes all through his ordeal. The man had shown no mercy, no regret. The only regrets he had were that he had been caught, not for what he had done.

But Kirk could also see the jury conferring and nodding as in agreement. It would appear that their sympathy was leaning towards Sanders. So, Stone had been right - Sanders could twist words, statements, and evidence... but he hadn't won yet.

The prosecutor put a tape in the recorder and the slides of Kirk's injuries were projected onto a large screen for all to see. A ripple of murmuring ran through the court, and Kirk had an uncanny feeling that a lot of it was of approval.

Stone nodded to the jury and went back to his seat; the Defender took the stand, removing the tape as he did so. He extolled the virtues of Sanders, explained how he had used initiative in capturing Taylor. That had he gone to the cottage during the day it would have alerted Taylor to his imminent capture. To suggest that Sanders was on that land for any other reason was ridiculous -- where were all the Ragodians that the witness said he had seen there? No, it was the fabrication of a man hoping to escape with a lighter sentence himself. He was practically daring the jury to convict his client of anything other than ill-treating a prisoner. Eventually he too returned to his seat.

Stone took the floor again. "Well," he said, slightly bowing to the jury, "this has all been very interesting. Our friend Sanders here stands whitewashed from any foul deed. I have no doubt that most of you in this courtroom, if given the chance now, would vote this man 'not guilty'. But it is not true that he ordered the whipping out of a moment's disgust -- the general ill-treatment was carried out over the full 36 hours pending the arrival of the Enterprise. I tell you now, this man is a liar, and a sadistic bully..."

"Objection!"

"Objection sustained. Commander Stone, please confine your remarks to fact, and not your own personal opinion," demanded the presiding officer.

"Sorry," Stone muttered quietly, bowing again to the jury. Then speaking louder, "I would like to call Dr. Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise."

McCoy looked surprised, but went over to the stand.

"Dr. McCoy, as you know, from the minute you enter this court, you are on oath."

"I know."

"Tell me, Doctor, what condition was James Taylor in when he was brought aboard the Enterprise?"

"Severe haematoma, lacerations and internal bleeding."

"And is it not correct that later you found he also had cracked ribs and stomach injuries?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"How, from you medical experience, do you think these injuries were caused?"

"Objection!"

Stone just raised an eyebrow at the presiding officer.

"Objection denied. You may proceed, Dr. McCoy."

Stone breathed a sigh of relief. He had known that the Defender would try to steer the evidence away from Kirk's injuries, and it had been quite possible that the presiding officer would consider such evidence immaterial. He therefore continued, "Dr. McCoy, please tell this court how, in your opinion, these injuries were caused."

"Initially, with a whip. The stomach injuries were caused at a later time, and are consistent with being punched repeatedly in the stomach."

"So the injuries were caused at different times, and not at one time, as the defendant has led us all to believe?"

McCoy looked directly over at Kirk. "That man was beaten over a number of hours."

"How can you tell this?"

"Because of the bruising. Even a first-year trainee nurse could tell you. Bruises alter from hour to hour. A minute-old bruise is totally different from one a few days old."

"I see, Doctor. Thank you." Turning to the Defender, who stood up, he asked, "Do you have any questions?"

"No, we do not now dispute Dr. McCoy's report."

"Thank you, Doctor. You may stand down." Stone then turned back to the jury. "I now call James Taylor. Let it be noted here and now that it is not the witness who is on trial today. We have all seen the Taylor tape, thanks to my learned friend here." There was a definite edge of sarcasm to his voice as he bowed slightly to the defence counsel.

Kirk was then motioned to his feet and escorted by two guards over to the stand. He looked down as he passed Spock and McCoy, but he was sure he heard a faint whispered 'good luck'. He took the stand, and was thankful that it was facing to the right of Sanders.

Stone came and stood in front of him. "James Taylor, you are now on oath - do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Would you now please tell this court, in your own words, exactly what happened on the planet Ragodan."

Kirk cleared his throat -- he knew he had to be careful how he gave his evidence -- he didn't want to sound too much like a Starship Captain. So he tumbled his words out, losing much of his usual impeccable grammar.

"I was staying at this cottage down near the Crystal Sea, just swimming, fishing, and then one night, after I had been there about six days, these men and him," he pointed to Sanders, "were in my living room. They were all pointing phasers at me -- I hadn't done anything and I asked them what they wanted." He pointed again at Sanders. "He said I was going to be taken prisoner and handed over to Starfleet, but I must have annoyed him because the next thing I knew he had ordered his men to strip and whip me."

"This was at Sanders' orders?"

"Yeah."

"Objection!" shouted the Defender, standing up. "This has already been established. The Prosecutor is just trying to undermine my client's character by going over it again."

Stone interrupted. "That is not so. This is totally relevant to the prosecution's case."

"You may proceed," nodded the presiding officer. "Objection overruled."

Stone turned back to Kirk. "Did Sanders at any time show any remorse?"

Kirk snorted. "Him? No -- he and his men enjoyed it, and they continued it the following day."

"Why do you think you were detained at the cottage and not taken back to the U.F.P. Headquarters in Garoda?"

"Because he obviously had no intention of going back there at that time. And the Enterprise would be in orbit in 48 hours anyway, so he just had me tied to the fencing surrounding the cottage."

"So he did give you the impression that he was at the cottage for other purposes?"

"Of course he was. I was just incidental -- wrong place, wrong time, you know. He wanted me out of the way -- there was a lot of coming and going with the Ragodians, too."

Sanders leaped up out of his seat, and leaning forward, shouted, "Lies, all lies! This man would say anything to save his own skin!"

The court erupted. The presiding officer was banging his gavel on his desk to

no avail, and it took some time to quieten the courtroom down. A low murmuring could still be heard.

"Silence! I will have silence! This is a court of law. Any more interruptions like that and the Defendant will be removed from this court."

Sanders seemed indifferent - he had effectively interrupted Taylor's evidence at a crucial point, which had been his intention. Stone had finished, but did request the right to recall the witness should it be necessary.

The Defence Counsel then took the stand, and came and stood directly in front of Kirk. "You have not been completely honest with the court, have you, Taylor?"

"Yes, I have," Kirk replied belligerently.

"Oh, I don't think you have. You have omitted two pieces of evidence: one, that you offered the defendant and his men a bribe if they let you go free; and two, that the beating you received was a direct result of your resisting arrest."

//True,// Kirk thought to himself, wondering how to handle this aspect of his evidence. In the end he just grinned, a shade arrogantly - or so the Defence Counsel thought. "Well, wouldn't you? There were six of them, and they were all armed with phasers. I wasn't."

The smile etched on the Defence Counsel's face was more of a sneer. "Oh, that is quite possible. Perhaps, if I had been in your position, I would have offered a bribe or resisted arrest." The sarcasm was heavy. "However, in this instance I would like this court to know that the defendant did have some justification for what he did." He moved away from the stand and bowed to the jury. "I have no more questions for the witness."

Kirk was then dismissed from the court, and the presiding officer then called for any more witnesses or evidence.

Stone stood up once again. "Yes, one more. I have no doubt that this court is aware of the Career of Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. But for those of you who are not familiar with it, perhaps you would listen to this in order to determine the kind of man I now call for my next witness." He placed Kirk's identity disc in the recorder. The computer voice echoed around the silent courtroom.

"Kirk, SC-937-0176-CFO. Service rank: Captain. Position: Starship Command. Current assignment: USS Enterprise. Commendations: Palm of Axanar Peace Mission; Grankite Order of Tactics, Class of Excellence; Pentares Ribbon of Commendations, Classes First and Second. Awards of Valour: Medal of Honour; Silver Palm with Cluster. Three times wounded, Honour Roll. Galactic Citation for Conspicuous Gallantry. Karagite Order of Heroism..." And so it droned on.

As Sanders had reason to believe that Kirk would be grateful to him for bringing his brother's murderer to book, he was not in the least concerned. In fact he was a little puzzled as to how Kirk could be a prosecution witness.

Stone continued. "I do not think many of you have ever met Captain Kirk, although his exploits and those of his crew are widely known. Perhaps it is time for this court to meet this legendary figure."

He nodded to a court official nearest the door, who immediately withdrew into the corridor. A voice echoed in the distance. "Captain James T. Kirk wanted in court."

"Before Captain Kirk comes into this courtroom, I would like you all to consider this case as it stands at the moment." Stone turned around and faced the jury. "Let us assume that Sanders was told by a person or persons unknown that the said James Taylor was staying at the cottage. It is quite feasible that he would consider apprehending the man at night for fear of his escape. However, I still feel much need be explained regarding the need to take six fully-armed men, and also holding the prisoner at the cottage rather than bringing him back to Garoda for imprisonment. It would appear by his own evidence that Sanders has not

accounted for all of his actions.

"However, gentlemen, let us now consider another theory. Just for the moment, let us suppose that James Taylor does not exist except in two files, one of which is held by my office, and the other by Captain Kirk of the USS Enterprise. Just suppose that one of those tapes was filed in the library at Garoda - where would that 'person or persons unknown' that the defendant mentioned have come by his information if he did not exist?"

If Stone had turned around at that point, he would have seen Sanders stiffen, already halfway to the 'real truth' of this case, although he was still far from suspecting that Taylor and Kirk were the same man.

"Certainly this 'person or persons unknown' would not have had the time to sift through the files in the Garoda library. There can only be one other solution, and that would be that the Defendant had found out that someone else was using the cottage on land he used himself. Once he knew the name of that person, he instituted the search through the library himself, and came up with the Taylor tape. That is why he decided to take six of his men to the cottage, to apprehend this man and despatch him to the Federation starship and out of Ragoda for good. We all know the rest of the story - in the light of this, everything the Defendant has said up to now would be a tissue of lies to cover up his own illegal schemes."

He turned around now to look up into the seething face of the Defendant, and with a knowing smile he said, "And gentlemen, I do have that proof. You see, there never was a James Taylor." He nodded to the courtroom official. "I now call Captain James T. Kirk."

Exactly on cue Kirk entered the courtroom, wearing full military dress; his face was also being projected up onto the main screen. A gasp went up from the jury and the court; there were exclamations, the general hubbun rose, and media acanners whirled. Kirk reached the stand feeling slightly embarrassed by the furore, not caring to glance Sanders' way. He felt no triumph either, just a void, empty feeling.

Before the Security men guarding Sanders realised his intent, the Defendant was over the barrier and charging straight at Kirk, shrieking hysterically, "I'll kill you, Kirk! I'll kill you!"

Only one had been watching him and guessed his intent, and before the deranged man had time to reach his prey strong arms held him in a vice-like grip, and a deep voice, which he recognised instantly, calmly said, "You will not."

Sanders struggled frantically in the Vulcan's grip, that calm voice drumming through his brain. He was now well beyond what previous sanity he had had. He was quickly subdued and handcuffed, and practically dragged out of the court, his vindictive hatred still issuing from his lips in a mass of unintelligible words. The last thing Sanders saw was the Vulcan taking Kirk's hand, and the shher affection shining from Kirk's eyes.

It took a considerable time to quieten the court down, and in the end a recess of thirty minutes was called. It took some time to get the media away from Kirk and his two fellow officers. Such a happening in a court of law had not occurred for years, and they were going to make the most of it. Eventually Stone managed to shut out the scanners and media, and leaving the three men on their own, went off to find out what was going to happen now. There was no getting away from it, Stone was absolutely jubilant - it had gone far better than he had thought it would.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy were all silent. For once even McCoy seemed lost for words.

Later, when Stone returned, they discovered that the six men Sanders had used were all giving evidence as fast as they could in the hope of getting off with a light sentence. As for Sanders, he would no doubt be charged with many offences, but with diminished responsibility. Probably he would be sent to a

Rehabilitation Centre before he would be allowed back into society.

* * *

Ten days later the Enterprise was heading away from Earth at warp 6 en route for Eglon IV, taking urgent medical supplies. That morning Kirk had received another message from Stone, and feeling this time that both Spock and McCoy should be informed of its contents, he summoned them to his quarters. They arrived together, and found him sitting at his desk.

"Come on in, you two," he said, pointing to two chairs opposite him. "Sit down."

After they had taken their seats they waited. Kirk was sitting there grinning.

"Had another tape from Stone."

"Hmpmh!" Muttered McCoy, refusing to rise to the bait. Spock, as impassive as ever, just raised an eyebrow slightly.

Kirk chuckled openly. "He was just letting me know that the Ragodians have decided in favour of membership of the U.F.P. They are apparently so impressed with Starfleet and the legal system, particularly the handling of the Sanders case, that it did not take them long to come to an agreement."

"I suppose, from the look on your face, that you're pleased that you had a lot to do with it?" enquired McCoy sweetly.

"Well..."

McCoy then changed tactics and homed in for the attack. "Look, Jim, all I know is that every time you set out on one of these crazy schemes, I'm the one who has to carry out the repairs."

Kirk just grinned, letting McCoy score a hit, and knowing there was no justifiable reply, only that it was his job. And they all knew that, anyway.

"You're quiet, Spock," he said suddenly.

"Yes, Captain. I was just thinking... it would seem a pity if Federation influence was to alter the Ragodian's way of life in any way."

"Oh," Kirk said thoughtfully; he was thinking back to his first few days on Ragodan. "Hmmm. I suppose you're right. But the Ragodians are a stubborn lot, and I don't think they'll allow any changes if they don't want them. I hope not, anyway. I'd like to go back there some day - I've apparently been given an 'open time limit'," he said with a pleased smile. "Oh, and so have you two."

McCoy just groaned.

"But not yet." Kirk stood up. "Care for a drink, you two?"

"Most certainly," McCoy said eagerly.

"Well, Bones, as Spock and I are on duty in fifteen minutes, I suggest we adjourn to the mess room for coffee."

McCoy once again was lost for words, and just groaned; but he followed them anyway.

